

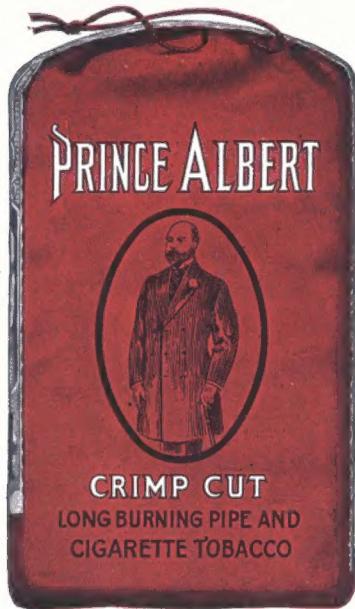
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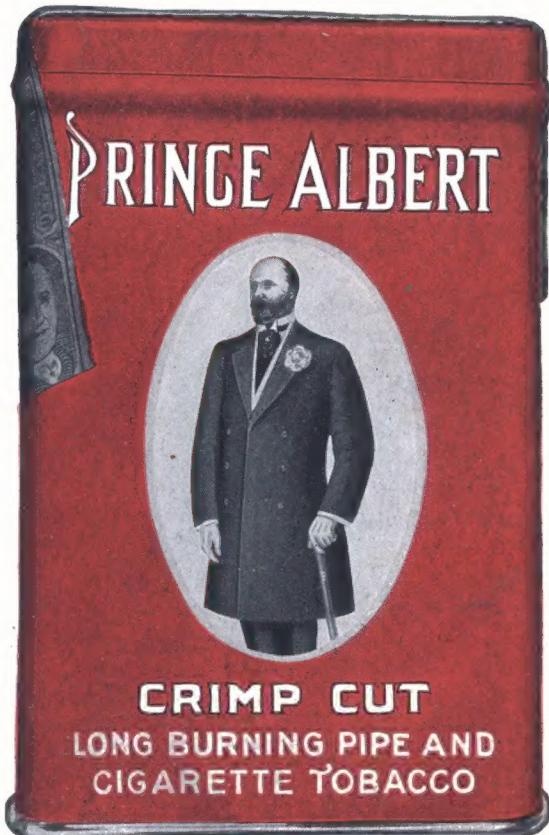
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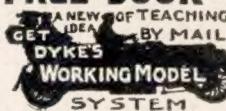
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No. 1

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VOLUME XXV

NUMBER 4

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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Introducing the Apache Kid, train robber, philosopher, critic of morals, "white" man through and through, "the smartest bad man and the prettiest that ever terrorized a community." A story with the Stevenson flavor.

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Twice-a-Month Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York.

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Reg. U. S.
Pat. Office, 1906
Carl Freschl

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXV.

SEPTEMBER 1, 1912.

No. 4.

Short-Bred

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "A Desert Odyssey," "On Irish Hill," Etc.

Mr. Kyne's first long novel for us has the same compelling interest that characterized his short stories. You have enjoyed his yarns of the West, of the desert, of the Irish quarter in San Francisco, of the newspaper world. Now comes a long novel from him about a jockey—a little waif of New York. Mr. Kyne's versatility is a constant surprise—and a joy. No story of his is like another—save in its engrossing quality. He knows all there is to know about the race track, and if you have sometimes wondered why the sport of kings has fallen into disrepute, you may find here some very good reasons. The young jockey is an admirable piece of character drawing, and we know you will follow him with interest on his pilgrimage to the goal—an unexpected goal, by the way, but a highly desirable one.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

IT almost seemed as if the Almighty had decreed in the very inception of his loveless existence that Freddy O'Brien's life line should be linked to a horse.

The first that the world knew of Freddy was when a guard on the Sixth Avenue Elevated, approaching the Battery, and finding himself with nothing more to do, suddenly bethought himself of a fifty-cent bet which he had on a horse in the fourth race at Westchester. Since it was quite within the realms of probability that some one had left an afternoon sporting edition on one of the seats, the guard started down the aisle on a search. He saw a bundle, loosely wrapped in a familiar pink sheet,

lying in one of the cross sections, and as he stooped to pick it up a sixty-four-point headline met his glance:

WAIF WINS AT 40 TO 1.

"Twenty to the good!" he thought, much pleased at his foresight in picking that particular horse—and just then something warm and tiny closed firmly on his grimy forefinger. The guard paused, with the strangest kind of a little tremor running through him. With his left hand he lifted the bundle. Carefully he unrolled it, and a naked baby lay in the hollow of his arm.

"Well, I'll be——" he ejaculated, and stared at his find. "Here's something for the lost-property department."

The newspapers carried a freak story of the event the next morning. It was

whimsical enough to make good copy. The public was informed that the name Frederick O'Brien had been found scrawled on the margin of the newspaper in which the baby had been wrapped. Since no one came forward to furnish a substitute, the waif was entered at a foundling asylum under that name, and the world forgot him by lunch time.

There is nothing remarkable about the life of a foundling in New York City, and the circumstances surrounding Freddy's advent, even if peculiar, created no special interest in his behalf on the part of the matron. They had dozens of Freddy's kind on hand before Freddy arrived. He was just a waif—wizened, undersized, ill-nourished, and only his gray eyes and flaming red hair supported the rather flimsy evidence that his name was O'Brien.

For five lonely, loveless years Freddy stayed at the refuge. He was not a beautiful boy, so nobody cared to adopt him; and in an institution managed strictly along business lines none cared to take the little Irish lad to heart and mother him. When he was five, the matron, despairing of getting rid of him via the ordinary channels, recommended his removal to an orphanage; so the good sisters took Freddy in, and cared for him as kindly and as carefully as they did for any other of their seven hundred charges.

When Freddy was fourteen years of age, and looking scarcely ten, a great event happened in his life. He was adopted—at last.

The boy never forgot the day on which he first saw his foster parents. He was sulking in a corner of the yard when one of the sisters came to him, took him by the hand, and led him into the big bare apartment utilized as a reception room. There Freddy faced a man and a woman who looked him over with frank curiosity.

The man was a short, slender, hollow-cheeked individual, with small black eyes, deeply set. He was very dark of skin, and his most prominent feature was his large nose. He spoke with an accent which proclaimed his Teutonic

origin. His wife was built on generous lines, and was taller than her husband. Her broad, homely face lighted with a smile as she gazed on Freddy's red head. The Germans, be it known, are fond of red hair.

"How would this boy do, Mr. Engel?" inquired the sister.

Herr Engel took two steps toward Freddy, and the foundling shrank back. He would have fled had not the sister held him tightly by the hand, while both Engel and his wife went over him on a tour of minute inspection. For instance, Engel lifted him as if to ascertain his weight—and nodded his head as if satisfied, after which he felt of Freddy's thin arms and legs, looked at his hands, and nodded again. Frau Engel, on her part, contented herself with prodding him here and there, much as she would have gone over a Christmas goose. In the end, they exchanged a glance of mutual understanding. For once in his life, Freddy O'Brien had created a favorable impression.

"He's Irish?" queried Engel.

"We believe so. We have no record of his parentage."

Herr Engel grunted. "Short-bred, eh?" He indicated some scratches on the orphan's face. "Also he fights the other boys?"

"He is quick-tempered, and fights, but he seldom quarrels without cause," the sister hastened to explain. Engel grinned.

"He has blue eyes, and a red head; also the other boys he fights. Ja-a-a! He iss Irish. Always Irish are the best." Engel's manner was oracular. "We take him," he added. "Give me a card with the particulars, and I will have for the adoption the papers made out."

At his initial meeting with the Engels, Freddy had felt that instinctive aversion which, in peculiar and sensitive children, is more strongly marked than in those of far greater knowledge of human affairs when they meet a pre-destined enemy. The boy did not like Engel. To him there was something repulsive in Engel's every action. Toward Frau Engel he felt more kindly.

She was a woman. She had patted his cheek and spoken to him in a language that he did not understand; yet it appeared to the waif that it was something tender and motherly she had said; so, despite his dislike for Engel, there was that about his wife which caused the orphan's hungry little heart to warm to her.

It was a gray, lowering day when Freddy left the orphanage to trudge through the muddy streets, assailed by strange sights and sounds, and shrinking close to Frau Engel's side. They walked faster than Freddy would have wished. He had difficulty keeping up with them, and just as he had commenced to marvel at the size of the world they turned into a park, facing which stood a great gray building. Once inside the building, they made their way into an illy ventilated room, where at a desk sat a gray-whiskered man. In fact, it was a gray day in Freddy's life. Herr Engel talked with the man, who bobbed his head as if he knew in advance just what Herr Engel was going to say. Then he looked hard and searchingly at the boy, after which he prepared some documents, which were duly signed by Engel and his wife and countersigned by another man who sat at another desk close by.

Thus was consummated the first great event in the career of this boy without a pedigree. His name was no longer Frederick O'Brien. It was Frederick Engel, and, after the manner of the Germans, Frau Engel substituted Fritz for Frederick. From that day forward the waif was known as Fritzie Engel, which brought no joy to the Irish soul of him.

"I think we got a good boy, all right," remarked Mrs. Engel, as they left the courtroom.

"Yes?" There was doubt in her husband's tone. "Well, maybe he makes a good jockey, too, which is more better."

"But the judge—he said Fritzie must go to school. How can he learn to be a jockey and stick by the schoolhouse all the time?"

"He shall work and learn the books also. It is not hard for the Irish to

learn quick about horses. Look at all the good riders. They are micks, eh, most of them? See! McLaughlin and Garrison and Fitzpatrick and McGee and maybe this Fritz gets to be a first-class jockey, and we fool everybody. The people they will think he's German, and all the time he is Irish."

Herr Engel chuckled over his prospective joke on the racing public.

"And if to be a crackajack rider he should develop, he'll make for us a hatful of money," was the crowning recommendation of the boy that came from Engel's lips.

This frank discussion of his future Fritz listened to with mixed feelings. His first liking for Frau Engel began to wane. Young as he was, and so absolutely unused to the ways of the world, his native intelligence warned him that, after all, his condition had not changed—he was nobody's boy. Nobody cared for him, and the motive of the German and his wife in seeking him out was no longer concealed. As he hurried along beside them the flames of revolt were already kindling in his Irish soul.

However, in the midst of all this mental misery, the day was destined to furnish one bright spot in the gloomy scheme of things. The Engels took him to a restaurant, and for the first time in his life he was allowed to have all he desired to eat, and a wide variety from which to choose. Evidently the Engels believed in feeding him well. He had two pieces of pie.

Luncheon over, Engel paid the score, and disappeared, leaving Fritz in charge of Frau Engel, who took him to a juvenile-clothing store, and outfitted him in attire which to Fritz's inexperienced eyes seemed to be the habiliments of a fairy prince. Then Frau Engel took him home.

There was a delightful ride on a ferryboat, and another in a street car. Near Gravesend they alighted, and proceeded to a little cottage close to the race track. Mother Engel let herself in with a latchkey, and her adopted son followed as one treading on dangerous ground.

Of Fritz's life with the Engels much might be said and written, but it can best be summarized as one series of bickerings, sufferings, and sulks. When he had been adopted, it had been understood that Fritz should spend certain intervals at school, but since there was no stipulation as to the exact time or method of his schooling, Herr Engel decided that his adopted son's education should be gained at night.

Every morning the German took Fritz to the race track where he stabled his string of thoroughbreds. Here it was that what of happiness there was in the life of the foundling was experienced. Here he found something which appealed to him, something on which he could lavish all the affection of his real nature. Herr Engel encouraged him in all things that pertained to horseflesh, watching him closely always.

Fritz, like nearly every Celt, had an inborn fondness for horses. He was never tired of petting them, although, after his first attempt in this direction, he was careful not to do so in the presence of his foster father. That first time, when Engel caught him stroking the nose of a horse which had been done up and put away after its morning work-out, he harshly commanded the boy to quit fooling with the animal.

Fritz could not understand why the order had been issued, and Engel was too pig-headed to explain that it was not good policy to disturb the high-strung thoroughbred at a time when it should be resting and composing itself after a nerve-racking effort. Hence all the deviltry of the boy's sullen nature was aroused. In addition, he was overwrought by the strain of his studies in the night school, after busy mornings spent about the stable, and afternoons in which he did the chores and much of the housework about the cottage home. The very sight of Engel was sufficient to throw him into a rage, none the less dangerous because it was concealed.

Fritz had decided that he would slip away from the Engels and seek his fortune selling newspapers in the city, when an incident occurred which changed the entire course of his life.

Engel had given him a horse to lead around the walking ring—a horse almost as fretful as the boy himself. As usual, Engel stood by, watching. Possibly the flutter of a rag, or some other unconsidered trifle, alarmed the beast, for suddenly it began to rear and plunge and pull away from the boy.

Fritz, mindful of instruction he had received, instead of bracing himself, holding back on the halter shank, and thus endeavoring to pit his puny strength against that of the frightened animal, gave ground quickly. He slackened the strap, and moved toward the horse, uttering soothing sounds. The horse could not travel backward as fast as the boy could step forward—neither was it in a position from which it could swing sidewise effectively; so, after a few struggles, it quieted down, and sedately resumed its place in line.

It was the first test of the boy's horsemanship, and his coolness and skill were not lost on the turfman. For the first time, Engel smiled upon his adopted son. Reaching into his pocket, he produced a coin, which he handed to Fritz.

"You are a good boy, Fritzie. Some day a jockey you will make. You mind what I say, and maybe soon I let you ride a horse."

The orphan beamed. It was the first money he had ever owned, and he was sensible of a feeling of gratitude—not for the money so much as for the probation bestowed. Likewise, it was the first time this feeling had manifested itself. He felt the necessity of expressing it, but hardly knew how. While he was struggling to frame a suitable acknowledgment, the pleased smile passed from the German's face.

"Well, what do you say?" he demanded.

Fritz stared at him a moment.

"Say 'Thank you,'" growled Engel.

The boy stood, trembling and sullen, staring at the ground. He was glad now that he had not found the words in which to testify to an obligation to this man he hated.

Engel turned the horse over to a groom, and, in pursuit of his favorite method of punishment, reached for

Fritz's ear. The boy dodged, and flung the coin as far as his strength would permit. It was the first outward expression of the rebellion that seethed beneath his silent exterior.

Engel was quick to perceive this, and, brute that he was, resolved to retain the mastery at all hazards. He went into the tack room, and emerged with a strap in his hands.

Fritz took his beating without an outcry. When it was over, the last tie of fealty or respect that bound him to Engel was broken, and he had quite made up his mind to run away.

Now, Engel had handled many boys in his day, and he was familiar with the workings of the average boyish mind. He knew quite as well as Fritz did what the next move would be, and was prepared to meet it. Consequently when Fritz slipped away from the barn an hour or so later, Engel was close at his heels, and overtook him at the gate.

"Where're you going?" he asked casually.

Childlike, Fritz took refuge in a lie: "Home to Mother Engel."

The German regarded him grimly. "So? First we have a little talk. I think maybe now you know what you're doing—you've been around horses long enough—I'll let you ride."

At the words the sullen resentment faded from Fritz's face. His glance brightened, the bare suspicion of a smile appeared, and all thought of levanting vanished at this news that he was to be permitted to ride a horse at last. He had dreamed of this, but had not dared to hope that the dream would come true so soon.

Engel, observing his altered expression, knew that he had won. He produced another coin, which he tendered to the boy, who hesitated, then stretched forth an eager hand.

"If you don't feel that way, you don't need to say 'Thank you.'" Engel conceded, although hoping for further victory.

Fritz looked up at him, and grinned; but for the life of him he could not bring himself to voice the two words.

Apparently the omission passed unnoticed, and the German led the way back to the stable. He was very pleased to get a draw in this his first real battle with his adopted son.

The following morning Engel lifted Fritz into a saddle cinched to the back of a quiet old racer which was taking its walking exercise. It is impossible to describe the fierce thrills of delight which surged through the lad as for the first time he gripped a living, breathing horse between his little thighs. He had bestridden wooden horses in the yard of the orphan asylum, but this horse beneath him moved—pulsated with life and energy.

Engel took his stand where he could watch Fritz and his mount. A look of satisfaction overspread his face as he noted that the boy had the seat of a natural horseman.

"We'll take up your stirrups a little," he said. And then he went on to show him how to knot his reins in order that they might always be safely within his grasp and short enough to permit him to get a purchase on them; how, should occasion demand, to cross them on the horse's neck, and thus force the animal to bear the strain of holding up its own head; how to crouch forward over the withers, and thus shift the center of gravity from the back to the shoulders of the horse. The boy learned with amazing quickness, and when he slid to the ground Engel clinched his victory still further by saying:

"You be a good boy, and maybe every day I let you ride."

At subsequent lessons lightness of hand and self-restraint were impressed upon Fritz; but in learning these things he came also to understand that Engel valued these attributes only as applied to the treatment of horses.

As for Engel, looking on, and noting this gradual advance toward proficiency, he smiled more and more frequently. Once he even permitted himself to rub his itching palms together joyfully.

"About the Irish I am right," he congratulated himself. "Always they make the best riders—it's only a question of how good."

CHAPTER II.

There is as great a difference between exercising a horse and working him as there is commonly conceded to be between chalk and cheese. It requires art to work a horse—an accomplishment many race riders do not possess. Rare judgment of pace is essential, in that it is frequently desirable that each quarter mile of the journey—sometimes each furlong—be covered in practically the same number of seconds.

Should a horse be moved too fast when it is not ready for a speedy trial, the patient labor of weeks may be undone. Invariably orders are issued by the trainer that the early portions of a work-out be accomplished in a given time. Hence a boy "with a clock in his head" is invaluable. The possession of this sense of elapsed time is a gift. It may be improved upon, but never acquired. Fritz Engel had it fully developed. Of course, he did not come to the pinnacle of his ability in a day, but by the time he was sixteen years old his foster father had decided that his adopted son would develop into a great jockey, if—

That "if" was the direct result of a notion harbored by Engel that the lad was maltreating his horses. Had the German known that his grooms, cheap men, of whom poor service might have been expected, were a pair of drunken ruffians, and rarely at the barn after he went home in the evening, he would not have suspected the boy.

The man who rubbed the set Fritz rode habitually took it out on his charges when forced to break his sudden sleep to feed them in the early morning. A punch in the ribs, a clout over the nose, or a blow with a fork handle was the customary greeting he accorded the high-strung animals. When Engel was present, however, he was careful to control his cruel bent.

Fritz was unaware that he was under suspicion. The mornings he spent galloping Engel's horses were periods of exquisite joy to him. He loved the game, but, owing to an overanxiety for proficiency, he sometimes made mis-

takes. He pulled his mounts up too suddenly, or allowed a free runner too much head, and the mystified German, instead of handling the rider with the same care he accorded his horses, flew into a rage at the least sign of a lack of judgment on the part of the embryo jockey.

He could have led the lad with a string, but, believing him guilty of willful wrongdoing, he preferred to drive him with a strap and harsh words. The latter he employed daily, and only waited an excuse to ply the leather. He felt that he had just reason to do so on a day that he found Fritz belting with a switch a refractory colt which was trying to break through the fence with him. Since Engel knew that the boy had left the barn without a gad of any sort in his possession, he pulled Fritz off the horse, and thrashed him—in the presence of the bystanders.

No true Celt can stand for the lash, and Fritz's primal instinct was to fight back. He hated Engel, and wanted to hurt him, to beat him with his fists. But he realized the futility of a personal encounter with the active little Teuton, and in dogged desperation he schooled himself to bide his time.

To add to the boy's hard lot, a new element of torture entered into his life. He was known as Engel's son, and to the habitués Engel was known as "Dutch." One morning one of a group of railbirds, watching Fritz starting around the track for a work-out, hailed him.

"Hello, there, Dutchy," he called pleasantly. "What's the name of that colt?"

"I'm not Dutch!" yelled Fritz angrily. "I'm Irish. My real name's O'Brien."

"Tell it to Sweeny!" sneered another of the group. "You're a red-headed Dutchman."

Fritz rode on, and there were tears in his eyes. To his mind, it was a disgrace to be a German—not that he had any particular pride in his nativity, but because Engel was German, and Engel to him typified all of the miserable attributes of the human race, and none

of its virtues. Hence he resented bitterly his nickname of "Dutch," and, seeing that he resented it, his tormentors continued to address him by his new cognomen, little realizing to what extent they hurt him.

Things continued in this strain until the close of the metropolitan racing season. The winter meetings in California were soon to be held, and the Engels decided to move their string to the San Pablo track. Fritz rather hoped that Engel would decide to lose him in the hurry and bustle of preparing the horses for shipment, but evidently Engel still had faith in the boy's future as a jockey, for he made provision for Fritz in the express car with the horses and the help.

Herr Engel and his wife rode in the day coach until they reached Chicago, and there they secured a berth in a tourist car for the balance of the journey—for they were economical in all things.

The hegira of a racing stable is always productive of ingenious schemes on the part of turf followers for beating their way to the next meet. Engel never paid car fare for his employees if he could avoid it. He had a fake oat bin, with a six-inch compartment on top filled with grain; but the body of the bin was empty, with a small trapdoor in one end. This door opened inward. Engel indicated to Fritz that he was to crawl inside this contraption some time before the train started, and remain there until signaled to come out.

While the train was in motion there was no possibility of a railroad man gaining entrance to the coach, the end door being obstructed by the baggage of the turfmen, piled high behind the horses; so between stops the boy had the freedom of the car. This freedom amounted to the privilege of a seat or standing room in one of the spaces between the big sliding doors opening on either side—the balance of the room being occupied by a dozen horses marshaled in rows of three.

These areas, necessarily limited, were littered with bales of hay, bags of grain,

water barrels and buckets, and all the other impedimenta of the outfit. But from even this meager comfort Fritz had to scuttle to his hide-out like a rabbit whenever the train gave indication of stopping. On such occasions one of the grooms would also disappear into a hole behind the baggage, where he was "sweating" his way to the coast.

It was a long, stifling, tiresome journey, even to the groom, a grown man, who was beating his way through; but to the growing boy with a hearty appetite the discomfort of the trip was further accentuated by cold rations.

On occasion a swipe slipped out at a station and purchased a can of hot coffee. As he scalded his throat with the beverage and munched his sandwich, Fritz thought of Engel and his wife, snugly berthed and generously fed in the car behind, and his mental thermometer climbed steadily as he pondered on the injustice that was his portion.

Six days after leaving New York the train rolled onto the Oakland Mole, and the car containing the Engel string was cut out and shunted to the loading platform at the San Pablo track. Fritz put in a busy few minutes helping unload.

Usually when an owner is nearing his objective point he wires ahead to some one already on the ground, asking that a number of stalls sufficient to accommodate his string be bedded down. Engel, however, did not believe in spending money on telegrams.

When he had been directed to the quarters assigned him, he scurried away to attend to the bedding himself, and when Fritz and the grooms, assisted by volunteer help, arrived later with the horses, they found Engel with a hammer in his hand, going over the walls of the stalls very carefully in search of nails and other protruding menaces to the welfare of his horses.

He had been unable to connect with a feed man, but, pending the purchase of straw, he had struck up acquaintance with a horseman quartered in the same row.

Now, there is a freemasonry between horsemen the world over, and this stran-

ger, observing Engel's plight, hailed him cheerfully, after the manner of his Southern forbears.

"Hello, there, neighbor! Have a good trip? Where are you from?"

"Bully trip; not a horse sick. From New York," replied Engel. "You can tell me where a feed man I can find, maybe?"

"Some one's bound to be around to take your order. In the meantime, perhaps I can loan you enough straw to help out."

Engel eagerly accepted the invitation, and proceeded to help himself.

"I presume this is your string?" remarked the neighbor, when Fritz and the grooms arrived with the horses. "There's a sand pile just beyond the end of the barn if you want to let your animals roll."

"Sure!" assented the German. "Perhaps I better introduce myself. I'm Engel."

"Larue is my name, sir—William Larue. Unlike you, I am not really a race-horse man, although I always run a few horses at this meeting. I'm a rancher most of the year—up Yolo way, but I was raised in Gallatin, Tennessee, and can't seem to get away from the habit of racing a few thoroughbreds. Brought your own jockey with you, I see."

The rancher glanced questioningly at Fritz, and the German was quick to analyze the interrogation.

"I brought my son, but he's not a jockey—yet. Perhaps he will not be a jockey. He is rough with the horses. He can learn, but he is pig-headed."

Larue accompanied Engel to the sand pile, and assisted in removing the bandages from the horses' legs. He was a long, dark, lantern-jawed man, with kindly, humorous eyes. He had a habit of chewing the sweet joints of California hay, and was usually to be seen with a stalk of the aromatic fodder depending from the corner of his mouth.

Like many of the people of his native State, he was an ardent admirer of good horseflesh. He seemed to take almost as much pleasure in the sight of the horses rolling and grunting in the

dirt after their long, wearying journey in cramped quarters as did the animals themselves. But he kept casting curious glances, first at Fritz, and then at Engel, as if he had already discovered the anomaly of an Irish son and a German father.

The horses having been turned loose in the stalls, to be cared for later on, the saddles, blankets, bridles, and other dunnage were disposed in the tack room, together with a bed and a cot—the one for the grooms and the other for Fritz.

Larue watched this latter proceeding with mild interest, and when Engel, without taking the trouble to thank Larue for his kindly services, bade him good afternoon, and announced his intention of joining his wife at a hotel in Oakland, the Yolo County rancher noticed that Engel had failed to make provision for the accommodation of his son, other than what was obtainable in the tack room.

"Where do you eat, sonny?" he inquired of Fritz.

"I dunno," the boy replied frankly. "Tim," indicating the groom who acted as stable foreman, "has been here before, and he knows where to take me."

"Sure!" put in Tim. "We'll go to the Irish Kitchen."

"That sounds all right," chuckled Fritz.

"Huh!" grunted Larue. "If it wasn't for your German daddy, I'd swear you were Irish."

"I am Irish!" was the quick and earnest response. "That Dutchman ain't my father. He just adopted me."

"So that accounts for it, eh?" Larue selected a promising bit from a newly opened bale of hay. "See you again, sonny," he remarked, and strolled back to see to his own horses. Fritz looked after him, and concluded that the stranger was a nice man. He liked the men who called him "sonny."

For two reasons William Larue was interested in his German neighbor's son. The first was that, owing to the fact that he was not regularly in the racing business, he had no jockey of his own. He ran his horses for the pure joy of winning races rather than purses, and

he held no fastidious notions regarding the attributes requisite to a clever rider. Any bright boy who could do the weight and ride reasonably well would suit old man Larue, who was not prepared to pay a high retainer for a contract on a jockey with a reputation.

Moreover, Larue knew that jockeys develop suddenly. A few wins will make a rider famous, and he who was king yesterday may be second best tomorrow.

But the most potent reason for William Larue's obvious interest in Fritz was because the boy was friendless, and Engel the proverbial ogre into whose hands it seems that boys like Fritz are ever destined to fall.

"By the way, Engel," Larue remarked one morning about a month later, "do you figure on putting Fritz up on any of your horses this winter? If you think he can be trusted to ride half-decent race, I'll give him a mount occasionally."

Engel laughed. "Fritz is not a jockey yet, Mr. Larue. When he learns something more, perhaps I try him out."

"I have a youngster entered in a maiden race to-morrow," Larue continued, "and I've got a great notion to let Fritz ride her. She's green, and has no chance to be in the money, so I don't want to engage a jockey that might beat her up. Fritz handled her very nicely when you let him work her for me the other day, and I think he would ride her a good race." He turned, and called to the boy, who was standing in the doorway of a distant stall: "Hey, Fritz! Come here, sonny. How would you like to ride Yolo Queen for me to-morrow?"

The lad looked questioningly at Engel, and his heart thumped until the rush of blood through his arteries caused a humming in his ears. He had been expecting this question for some time. He had hinted that he would like to ride, and Larue had promised to give him a chance, but now that he had really been asked the strain of waiting for the German's permission was almost unbearable. Engel nodded, and the tears started in Fritz's eyes.

"Thank you, Mr. Larue," he said huskily.

Engel started at him, surprised. "So-o-o?" His rising inflection was in exact accompaniment to his increasing amazement, and his memory harked back to the incident of the coin. After all, it was in the boy to feel grateful, although not to him, his foster father, to whom he owed the very knowledge that had gained him this opportunity for which he now professed his thanks.

Engel vaguely resented the preference revealed by the boy's simple words, but his wonderment over the moisture in Fritz's eyes speedily caused him to dismiss his jealous thoughts, if jealous they were. The only tears he had ever been able to wring from Fritz had been tears of rage, and even as his mind grappled with this amazing problem, without in the least comprehending it, his speculations gradually simmered into a feeling of deeper anger against the boy. Engel was hurt. He knew not why nor how, but he felt the twinge, and vaguely he resolved that the boy should pay for it.

"How about his license, Engel? Will you attend to that?" Larue's voice brought the German back from the realm of bitter thought.

"I suppose so," he conceded grudgingly. "Only if you want the boy to ride your horse, Mr. Larue, it's only fair that you should the license fee pay and buy his tack. I ain't spendin' no money on Fritz."

"I'll loan him one of my saddles. As for whip or spur, he won't need it on the mare. But you ought to get him his boots and breeches."

"What does your mare carry?" Engel was very cautious.

"A hundred and ten."

"Fritz weighs ninety-four. He'll need a lead pad."

"Well, I'll get him a lead pad if you'll furnish his boots and riding trousers."

"Then there's the license fee."

"Oh, I'll pay that, too," snapped Larue, a trifle disgustedly, "if you'll make application for the license this afternoon. Fritz can reimburse me from the money I'll pay him for riding."

"All right, Mr. Larue," replied Engel sourly, although secretly he was much elated at the turn affairs had taken.

Despite the boy's sullenness and his suspected rough handling of the horses, Engel had never been able to disabuse his mind of the notion that in his adopted son he had an excellent prospect. Nevertheless, he hated to intrust Fritz with one of his own horses, for fear that the boy might injure the animal in some way.

With Larue's horses it was different, and Engel was more than willing that Fritz should acquire experience as a jockey at Larue's expense. In addition it would present an opportunity for him to judge of the boy's ability as a race rider. Hence his grudging assent to Larue's proposal was merely a ruse to hide his secret elation. No matter what happened next day, Engel would not be the least interested spectator.

"Come along, Fritz," he ordered. "We'll go hunt up Lena, and buy the boots and breeches."

Lena, an elderly Swedish lady, who supported herself and several daughters by peddling goods about the track, was known to every jockey and stable hand at San Pablo. As she frequently extended credit, she did a thriving business. To Lena, therefore, Engel led the willing Fritz, and left him with her for measurements, while he repaired to the office of the racing secretary and made formal application for the necessary license.

That night Fritz slept but little. All night long he dreamed that he was riding Yolo Queen—first of a field of twelve—and the deep roar of the betting-mad crowd rang in his ears. When at daylight he rolled out of his blankets in the tack room, his first coherent thought was that the day was destined to be productive of the second big event in his young life.

CHAPTER III.

The morning of the day that Fritz Engel was to make his initial appearance as a jockey he saw a vision. It was a nineteen-year-old vision—a lovely

brunette, and at the sight the world suddenly opened up new vistas of pleasure to the lonely orphan boy. She came to the stable with Larue, her father, and Fritz heard Larue call her Helen. Fritz thought it was a nice name, and rolled it under his tongue like some sweet morsel, the while he poked his red head very cautiously from the door of a stall and watched her leading Yolo Queen out to the walking ring.

The fresh, dainty, country-bred girl, with her sweet, kindly face, was quite a contrast to Mother Engel, of the wine-colored countenance, who, in addition to her other features, was the possessor of a beard; and as Fritz watched Larue's girl he suddenly became aware of his own imperfections of dress and complexion, and slunk into the tack room in an excess of bashfulness, not unmixed with awe. He was only seventeen years old.

Presently he heard Larue calling him but he pretended not to hear, and fell to work polishing a bit as if his life depended upon it. Half a minute later Larue and his daughter came to the door of the tack room, and looked in.

"This is my very particular friend, Fritz Engel, Helen," Larue announced pleasantly. "Fritz, this young lady is my daughter, Helen. She owns Yolo Queen, and you're going to ride in her colors to-day. Do you suppose your father will let you breeze the mare a quarter for me?"

"Yes, sir," faltered Fritz, and blushed.

The girl saw the telltale flood of color, and liked him for it. She smiled, and nodded her shapely little head at him with something of the pertness and inquisitiveness of a healthy young sparrow.

Somewhat reassured at this, Fritz permitted himself a shy grin, and then blushed some more at his audacity, for girls were entirely too new an element in his existence to be approached without reserve and caution. Nevertheless, Fritz felt that it was up to him to say something, and since he wanted very badly to say something that would please her, his native blarney came to

his assistance with a frank avowal of special interest—not because she was Helen Larue, but because she was a girl, and glorious to look upon.

"I'd like to win with your mare, Miss Helen," he stammered, "just because she's yours."

Miss Helen smiled appreciatively. Her father chuckled, and reached for a straw.

"Fritz is not German, Helen," he remarked.

"I quite realize that, daddy," replied the girl, and held out her hand. "Even if you do not win, I shall know that you did your best."

Fritz took her hand awkwardly. It was a small hand, soft and warm and tender, and as the boy's calloused fist closed over it, lo! the miracle was wrought, and Fritz Engel from that moment became a man, with his first love affair on his hands.

The mare had already been caparisoned, and Larue lifted the lad into the saddle. He watched him as he cantered to the head of the stretch, and remarked:

"That boy is going to make a good rider some day, Helen. He understands a horse. But that man Engel will never bring out the best that's in him. He's too severe with the youngster, and I imagine thrashes him a great deal oftener than is quite necessary. Sad little dog, Fritzie, and the best little fellow I ever met, despite the fact that Engel leaves him entirely to the society of those villainous grooms. I've taken a real shine to him."

At twelve o'clock, with his tack on his arm, Fritz went with Engel to the jockey room to weigh in. Probably twenty other boys were already there, waiting to be called to the scales, and at Fritz's advent into this circle of horse-wise, aged youths, a shout went up, and a colored boy demanded information regarding the "new kid."

"That's Dutch Engel," sneered Willie Moran, the premier jockey at the San Pablo track. "Let's initiate him."

Fritz was pinched, shoved, twigged, and badgered about the jockey room, the while his physical and mental attributes

were frankly discussed. Moran gravely informed him that he would be spilled in his first race—that they would kill him. He painted a weird word picture of fictitious jockeys as he had seen them after the field had raced over their prostrate bodies. Knowing out of their own past experience how dear his new boots and breeches must be to him, they disparaged the articles in question.

Fritz took it all good-naturedly enough; nevertheless, it was with considerable relief that he heard the clerk of the scales call his name.

With his saddle on his arm, Fritz stepped on the scales. Yolo Queen was to carry one hundred and ten pounds, and the beam was set at that figure, the while his valet tossed thin flat pieces of lead onto the scale until the required weight had been met, whereupon Fritz retired to the dressing room, there to await the call to the paddock.

It came all too tardily. Fritz was riding in the first race, and at the tap of the saddling bell he followed his fellows out of the jockey room to a little fenced-off inclosure leading into the paddock. Here he was weighed again, in order to make certain that all was correct, after which he passed through a gate, and found himself in the paddock. His valet took the saddle and lead pad, and together they entered the stall where Yolo Queen was standing. Here they were met by Larue. While the valet saddled the mare, the Tennessean gave his rider his instructions.

"I've changed my mind about the whip," he said. "I think you had better carry one, so here it is," and he handed Fritz a brand-new bat. "If I know anything about horses, Yolo Queen is going to give you considerable trouble at the post. She's just like her mammy, and the old lady was as full of shenanigans as she could stick. Don't think I want you to beat the mare, but a little taste of the whip won't hurt her if she gets too gay. It might help, too, to keep her straight. As soon as the starter lets you go, throw the whip away. One of my grooms will be on watch along the back stretch and he'll pick it up for you. I haven't any particular orders to give..

The filly isn't ready for a hard race, and unless she gets away well I don't think she can win. If you find she's beaten, don't ride her out. On the other hand, if she gets off well, lay along with the bunch until you're nicely straighted away in the stretch, and then call on her. She'll respond. Do you understand?"

Fritz nodded. "You just want me to take her over there and try to teach her something," he suggested.

"That's about it. But don't mistake me. My horses are always trying. I want the filly to win if she can, but I just don't think it's possible in her present condition."

"I'll do my best, sir."

"That's the talk, sonny! Good luck to you," and the paddock judge giving the order to mount at that moment, Larue helped him into the saddle.

The bugle sounded for the race, and Fritz swung into his place in line for the parade past the grand stand and on to the post. As he trotted by, he saw Helen Larue and a middle-aged lady standing by the fence near the timers' stand. Helen waved her program at him.

As is frequently the case in a maiden race, there were several inexperienced horses in the field, and the starter had his work cut out for him. Yolo Queen showed that she had a mind of her own long before she got to the post. At the first turn she dropped behind the rest of the field and stopped to take a survey of her surroundings. Fritz coaxed, then booted her, but she continued to gaze calmly about, and declined to move. When one of the assistant starters tried to lead her, she backed away from him, and had to be driven to the post with a bull whip.

Arrived at the post, she rushed under the barrier, and Fritz narrowly escaped being dragged from her back by the webbing, for, in his inexperience, he had not looked for such a move. When Fritz had succeeded in bringing her to a stand, an assistant starter took her by the head, and, with one man leading her and another driving, she was forced to join the band.

But not for long. No sooner had she

been released, than she swung around and bolted down the track. Having been recaptured and returned to the post, an assistant took her by the chin strap and held her in her place next the rail. From this position, whenever the balance of the field lined up for what seemed a probable break, he would swing her around, Fritz doing his best to keep her headed in the right direction.

Now, starters have too many troubles to concentrate their attention on any one horse, so Fritz was instructed to tap the filly alongside the head with his bat, in order to keep her from whirling clear around when the assistant swung her. He did so, and the starter, catching the field in alignment at that moment, sprung the barrier.

The flutter of the webbing, the thud of the gate as it crashed into the bumpers at the top of the uprights, and the sting of the whalebone all conspired to daze the green mare. She squatted, and drew back from the terrifying combination. As the other horses sprang away on their journey, Fritz quickly shifted his whip, and struck the mare a blow across the quarters.

What Larue had feared came to pass. The apprentice rider, in his effort to use the whip, released his hold on the mare's head. She whirled, and was hopelessly left at the post. One of the assistants, angered at the filly's tactics, swung his long whip at her. She whirled again, the lash cut her flank, and, like a spring suddenly released, she leaped along the course in the wake of the flying field, now fully sixty yards distant. Rapidly she closed on the rear-most, when Fritz, suddenly regaining his wits, was minded of his instructions.

"Whoa, girl!" he soothed, taking a steady hold on his mount. "We're left, so take it easy. No use trying to catch them."

He calmed the frightened animal, steadied her in her stride, and cantered over the course far in the rear of the straining contestants. After passing the finish, he pulled up and returned to the judge's stand.

As he swung to the ground and relin-

quished the horse to Larue's groom, he was aware that Mr. Larue had joined his daughter and her companion, and that all three were watching him from their position in the infield. But he steadfastly refused to glance in their direction, and, with eyes downcast, walked into the scale room under the pagoda to be weighed for the third time that day.

When he came out of the scale room and started down the track to the paddock, he saw the Larues walking slowly, and, he thought, sorrowfully, toward the barn in the wake of Yolo Queen, who, in charge of her groom, was kicking spitefully at her blanket. Fritz sighed.

"I guess that's my finish as a jockey," he thought, but speedily a more important matter claimed his attention, for at the paddock gate, scowling ferociously, Engel awaited him.

"So-o-o? You beat up people's horses," he snarled. "When you get your clothes on, to the barn you will come. I will be waiting for you; yes."

While the boy was removing the bright silks of the Larue stable, his flimsy riding breeches, and the beautiful buff-topped boots, his gloom and melancholy deepened more and more. It was not that he feared Engel. But intuitively he realized that it was the German's intention to make an exhibition of him, and the more he considered the matter the firmer became his determination not to stand for the lash. He would fight back, and in order that he might not wage an unequal combat, he cast about for a weapon.

As he slouched across the infield, he kept his eyes on the ground. Presently he stooped and picked up a large round stone, weighing possibly a pound. This he slipped into the side pocket of his coat.

It was necessary for Fritz to pass Larue's barn in order to reach Engel's quarters. He endeavored to slip by without being observed, but evidently Helen Larue was watching for him.

"Oh, Freddy! Come here, please," she called.

She had called him Freddy!

He turned, very shamefacedly, and walked over to where the group were standing.

"I'm sorry," he protested; "I—I couldn't help it, Miss Helen. I might have won, with a half decent break."

"Of course you would, sonny," replied Larue heartily. "Didn't I tell you she'd be nervous at the barrier? I'm very well pleased with you, Fritz. You did nicely, in spite of it all. Lots of boys would have forgotten their orders, and ridden the heart out of the filly trying to make a showing, even when she was hopelessly out of the running. I'm glad you didn't show her up."

"Mother, this is Freddy Engel," said Helen, turning to the lady beside her. "He did nicely with Yolo Queen, don't you think?"

"I'm sure nobody could have done better," said Mrs. Larue, smiling kindly upon the boy.

"You're to ride my horse every time she starts," continued Helen. "Papa makes me pay my own riding fees, so I think he'll let me choose my own riders."

"They collect in advance for you young men," laughed Larue. "Won't take a chance with us poor horse owners."

"Well, 'prompt payments make long friendships,'" quoted Helen.

Fritz suddenly felt at ease. "Then I want to be paid promptly," he retorted; and the Larues laughed at the redhead's evident desire to turn a pretty speech.

"He's getting on," observed Mrs. Larue. Then she started nervously, as Engel's rasping voice was heard. He had approached unnoticed.

"Ja-a-a," he snarled, dropping into one of his Germanisms. "I was afraid, Mr. Larue. And I was right. So? The boy with the horses is too rough, and what happens? He is left at the post!"

He ran at Fritz and rushed him along in the direction of the tack room. "You will learn from the strap not to be so quick with the bat, maybe," he shouted angrily.

Fritz dodged, and slipped the rock from his pocket.

"You leave me alone, Dutch Engel!" he screamed passionately, poising the rock in his hand. "You shan't beat me before people. I'll kill you, first."

"Freddy!" cried Helen Larue.

"Let the boy alone," commanded her father. Fritz looked appealingly at Larue; and Engel, seeing his opportunity, closed on the boy, who raised his hand to strike.

"Don't, Freddy, don't!" pleaded the girl. Fritz hesitated and Engel grabbed him. The boy broke away, threw the stone from him, and ran to Engel's quarters. The German followed, plying the strap whenever he could get within reach, and the sounds of his vicious blows came sharply to the ears of Fritz's pitying friends.

"Stop him, daddy, stop him!" begged Helen.

Her father needed little urging.

"By gad, I hate to interfere in another's man's affairs, but I can't stand for this," he muttered, as with long strides he approached the door of the tack room. "Here, let's talk this thing over," he ordered, stepping in between Engel and his son.

Engel looked at him in astonishment.

"He must learn not to abuse the horses," he growled.

"And you might learn not to abuse the boy," retorted the rancher. "It was my horse, and if I don't object perhaps you shouldn't."

The blood was trickling from a cut on Fritz's head where the strap buckle had broken the scalp. A little red stream flowed over his face, lending him the appearance of having been dangerously wounded, although in reality he was not much hurt. Helen Larue, at her father's heels, peeped past his shoulder, horrified.

"You brute!" she stormed, her eyes flashing with anger and contempt. Engel merely grunted, and the girl crossed quickly to Fritz and dabbed at his gory face with her tiny handkerchief.

"You poor boy!" she whispered soothingly.

"There is nothing to talk about," snapped Engel to Larue. "He is my

boy, and I teach him the only way he will ever learn. It is not your business."

"I reckon you're right, neighbor. It is none of my business. But mebbe you don't know the circumstances. I gave him the whip, you know."

"He is no good," stormed Engel. "Already he has ruined with the whip three of my horses. He is a sulker and a sneaker. He hides around behind me, and my horses beats. I'll show him —" and in a transport of rage he struck the boy again.

William Larue grabbed the strap and shoved Engel away. There was a dangerous gleam in his eyes, and the German recognized it. Consequently, when Larue took him by the arm and led him outside, the German accompanied him with but a slight show of resistance.

"Possibly I can show you a way out of your difficulty," he suggested. "You are not satisfied with your son, but I think I can get along with him, and I need an exercise boy. What do you ask for a contract on the boy's services for the next four years?"

True, Engel was angry, but not angry enough to have lost his business sense. He considered a moment.

"Nearly three years I have had fighting with that boy," he complained, "and I wouldn't go through it again for a thousand dollars." He glanced at Larue shrewdly. "Fritz is just now getting worth something to me if he would behave himself."

"Quit beating about the bush," said Larue crisply, "and answer my question. How much do you want for a contract on that boy's services until he's twenty-one years old?"

Engel suddenly arrived at a decision. He realized that now that the boy had found friends—friends who would champion his cause—he would be harder than ever to handle. Engel felt also the hostility the Larues bore him, and knew that if they did nothing else in the matter they would very probably complain to the racing authorities of the manner in which he treated his son. Plainly it would be a clever stroke of business to get rid of Fritz, if he could.

do so with some measure of profit to himself.

"If you take the boy, I'll have to hire another," he explained. "That will cost thirty dollars a month, and about twenty a month for board."

"The board should not be taken into consideration. You'll have to board Fritz if you keep him."

"Ye-s, that's right. But there's the trouble and expense I've had with him. I tell you, Mr. Larue, if that sneaker hadn't—"

"You've had his services."

"Bah! He's spoiled my horses."

"All the more reason why you should talk business. Name your price. The boy may take a notion to run away tomorrow, and you'd be out of pocket."

"All right; we'll fix it like this: For one year I must pay wages of three hundred and sixty dollars. For four years that would be fourteen hundred dollars. Then you pay me say six hundred dollars for my trouble—that makes two thousand dollars—and you take the boy."

"Yes," drawled Larue, "and perhaps the boy gets spilled in his very next race, and never rides again. You're a hog, Engel. I'll give you five hundred for your trouble—for the contract, you understand? And I'll pay you thirty dollars a month instead of paying it to Fritz. You're entitled to his wages, anyhow, if you want them. In addition, I'll see that Fritz gets what clothes and money he needs, and I'll board him and take care of him."

The idea of drawing Fritz's wages seemed to appeal to Engel. A sly smile wrinkled the corners of his harsh mouth.

"I'll take it," he said. "When shall we make out the papers?"

Larue took a notebook and a fountain pen from his pockets, drew up a receipt, and handed it to Engel to sign. With it he passed a one-hundred-dollar bill.

"This is to bind the bargain. I'll get a lawyer to fix up the papers and bring 'em out to-morrow for you and your wife to sign. In the meantime, I suppose I may take the boy."

"Sure," said Engel contemptuously. "I'm glad to get rid of him at any price. He's short-bred. Maybe you'll have with him better luck than me, and, anyhow, he ain't got no people comin' around to bother you. That's one good thing, in case he ever gets to be a jockey."

Nevertheless, Engel made mental reservation as to the identity of Fritz's "people" in case he developed into a clever jockey. The remark that he, as the boy's adopted father, was entitled to his son's wages, was the most pleasing news he had heard in years, and he laughed as he turned to go.

"If it wasn't for getting into trouble with the stewards, I'd wrap that German brute's spine around his coat collar," soliloquized the lanky Tennessean.

He reentered the tack room, where Fritz lay stretched on his cot, under the kindly ministrations of Helen and her mother. Larue lifted him to his feet, and a wave of paternal tenderness surged through the big, kindly rancher, as the little, frail, wizened body hung weakly on his arm.

"You come along with us, sonny," he said. "I've bought you from Dutch Engel, and you're our boy now—"

He was interrupted by a hug and a kiss from his daughter. Having received the reward for his kindness of heart, he continued:

"Mother, you and Helen take our new boy home in the surrey, and I'll follow on the street car."

Helen placed her arm compassionately around the lad's shoulders and led him out to the horse and surrey that Larue used in making his frequent trips between the barn and the rented cottage his family occupied during the racing season at San Pablo. She helped him into the vehicle, climbed in beside him, and smiled at him with premature motherly tenderness. To her mind, Fritz was a very little boy, and she treated him as such.

Thus did the third great event in Fritz Engel's life take place.

The following morning, Larue took him to a clothing store in Oakland, where Fritz became the possessor of a

wardrobe that exercise boys may sometimes dream of, but seldom possess. Next, they visited a barber shop, where Fritz had a hair cut and the luxury of his first shave. When at last he stepped out of the chair, his new-found friend looked him over and grinned.

"Well, sonny, you're quite a fine young gentleman now," he remarked quizzically.

Fritz looked up at him like a little lost dog.

"You're awful good to me," he said simply. "I don't know what you're doin' it for, but you're awful good."

CHAPTER IV.

Steve Holland turned his stooped shoulders to the blast of the driving sou'easter, drew his mackintosh closely about his thin chest, and between coughs cursed the wind, the weather, and the circumstances which compelled him to be abroad in such a storm.

His light-blue eyes, peering shiftily from beneath bushy red brows, rested upon what had been the site of the heart of the wholesale district of San Francisco—upon rusting piles of twisted structural steel, grim reminders of the fire which followed the earthquake; upon scattered frame or galvanized iron shacks housing concerns whose capital could be indicated by no less than seven figures; upon rut-lined, dirt-choked streets; upon concrete cellar holes which the rivulets of rain slowly turned into muddy, unclean reservoirs.

The presence of Steve Holland in such surroundings seemed scarcely incongruous. In appearance, he was as forbidding and rusty as the burned district itself. Evidently he was waiting for some one, for he stamped impatiently, and tugged at his great red mustache, as several times he approached an automobile which stood on the curb before him. He was inclined to seek shelter from the downpour within the hood and tarpaulins which screened the tenantless seat, but as often he retreated, seemingly afraid to invade its privacy.

It was perhaps thirty minutes before the owner of the automobile appeared.

A tall, handsome man, well groomed and well fed—almost too well fed, if one were to judge by the dark pouches beneath his eyes—hurried from the door of a near-by commercial house, and leaped into the car, motioning Holland to a seat beside him. Apparently he deemed no apology or explanation of his tardiness necessary.

"Well?" he demanded curtly. It was evident that he was addressing an employee.

"You'd better drive uptown so I can get a hot drink. This confounded asthma—and I'm afraid I've caught cold." Holland's teeth chattered as he spoke. "There's no need of your coming to the track to-day, Mr. Kellar; that is, unless you want to. There's nothing doing. I called everything off on account of the rain. Grandee can't run a lick in the slop, and I thought best to wait for a day or two until we can get a line on the mud form, before we try to do any business. This sou'easter'll keep up for a week."

The man at the wheel nodded perfunctorily, but did not speak. Holland was cold and irritable, and also disinclined for further conversation, and it was not until the pair were seated at a table in a private room of a French restaurant in O'Farrell Street that the subject was renewed.

"Well, out with it, Holland. You've got something under your hat. You didn't come across the bay in this storm to tell me that the deal was off. You could have phoned that information."

"I want to talk to you about Engel, Mr. Kellar. You know I spoke to you before about that boy."

Kellar nodded and watched his henchman expectantly. The waiter set a bottle of Scotch, a small kettle of hot water, and the usual accessories, before Holland, who proceeded to mix himself a generous libation before he resumed.

"Why don't we meet here all the time?" he demanded complainingly, glancing about at his comfortable surroundings. "Then I wouldn't mind if you're late."

"S-s-sh!" Kellar leaned forward and .

whispered. "In a French restaurant the ears are always longer than the tongues. Soft pedal, Holland, and come down to brass tacks. What about Engle?"

"I think we ought to grab him," replied Holland. "He's sure a comer. Only been ridin' three weeks, and he's been in the money often enough to bear watchin'. The day before yesterday he put over three winners, and if I know anything about riders every owner at the track'll be after him soon. I want to glom that kid."

"Well, I told you to go ahead and use your judgment."

"I know. But he lives with his employer, and old Larue keeps his eye on him. I haven't been able to send anybody in that had the right kind of an opportunity to talk with him."

"How about his valet?"

"Jim Burrell's all right, but he's deathly afraid of Larue. The old man only engaged him a week ago, to handle the boy, and Jim's been on the hog so long he's leery of quarrelin' with a steady income until he's had a chance to size things up. He knows Larue. He's worked for him off an' on for five years, and that big farmer would come pretty close to killin' him if he found him up to anything crooked."

Kellar pondered. "Tell me about this boy. What kind of bringing up has he had?"

"Dutch Engel got him out of a New York foundling asylum and didn't have brains enough to know what he had. He used to larrup the kid, and I think Larue's daughter induced the old man to buy him from Engel. He lives with the family now, and Burrell tells me he's nutty about the girl. Follers her around and can't seem to keep his lamps off her. Larue knows the boy is goin' to make good, but even he don't know what a really good thing he has. He just lucked into the boy. He's foolishly fond of him, and treats the kid like one of his own family."

"Larue is square?"

"None more so."

"And the girl?"

"She's older than Fritz by about two years. Looks upon him as a nice little

boy, who won her a nice purse on Yolo Queen the third time out. He has a bad case of calf love on her—the little runt! You know how that sort of thing gets a boy. When the races are over he can't get home quick enough."

Kellar smiled caustically.

"Tell this Jim Burrell," he ordered, "to ingratiate himself with this boy and get his confidence. If his valet can dominate him to the extent of egging him on to make a nuisance of himself with Larue's daughter, she'll be quick to see which way the wind is blowing. She'll probably set him down and make him realize that he's only her father's jockey. Then will be the time to strike. Remember how we got Willie Moran? When their little hearts are aching, the first girl that comes along and soft soaps them can cure the ache. Keep your ear to the ground, Holland, and report daily. When this boy Engel begins to gloom and sulk, I'll feed him a prescription to cure him."

"You mean May Garwood?"

"No, no. May's too old; and, besides, it's dangerous. One premier jockey at a time, Holland. Moran is twenty years old now, and he's suspicious of May, as it is. A baby-faced blonde with a winning smile for the new boy. And I know her address. Flies are easiest caught with honey, Holland."

The rusty-red trickster of the turf nodded sagely. He was Kellar's confidential agent at the track, and was particularly adept at firing the balls which his wealthy employer manufactured. In short, Steve Holland's specialty lay in corrupting jockeys. Kellar's specialty lay in betting huge sums of money on fixed races.

"How about Silverton?" Holland resumed presently. "You've heard, of course, that they're goin' to start him in the Christmas Handicap?"

"No, I hadn't." Kellar's tired eyes lighted eagerly. "How does that happen?"

"Old Woolsey's a lot of a boob. He's never had even a suspicion that Moran pulled his horse, and don't know now what a good thing he's got whenever he

gets a ride. You know I induced Woolsey to give Moran the mount on Silverton—I'm pretty friendly with the old boy—and I've been fillin' him up with a lot of guff about Silverton not likin' a hard track, until now the old man's come to the conclusion that if it rains enough between now and the holidays he'll start his horse in the stake."

"Yes, but is Silverton good enough to beat the class of horses that will start in that race?"

"Maybe not. But he's a lot better than anybody else thinks. Moran tells me he could have won handily both times he rode him, and he was in with a nice lot each time. Then, you know, Moran is to ride Filbert, and Filbert is certain to be favorite! Well, with Filbert out of the way, and perhaps Greenwich, too—I think Levens will ride Greenwich—Silverton will have a royal chance. We ought to get a long price against him—possibly thirty or forty to one."

"How about Levens? We haven't been doing much business with that young man lately."

"That's not his fault. His valet is around after me every day. They're a greedy pair; they'd lick the paint off a house. But everybody is gettin' on to Levens, so he finds it hard to get a mount that has a really good chance to win. It doesn't take an owner long to get next to a kid that cheats. Still, Levens is a good rider, and some of the boobs'll still take a chance. He's engaged to ride Greenwich, and he's been promised five hundred dollars if he wins with him. That's a nice bait to make him try, anyhow, but he'd sooner take a sure thing on two hundred for losing."

"Well, go ahead, Steve, and fix it up," said Kellar. "Whatever you do suits me." He yawned, and showed a desire to end the interview. But Holland seemed satisfied with things as they were, particularly with the Scotch "and trimmin's." He stretched his long legs under the table, leaned back, and fixed his employer with a knowing eye.

"Well, what now?" demanded Kellar impatiently.

"Who do you think will ride Silverton?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Who?"
"Engel."

Holland confidently and smilingly awaited the approval of his principal. Kellar pondered the situation at length. Holland's smile faded, and he asked, somewhat doubtfully:

"Well?"

"You know, Holland, I have great faith in your judgment, and I believe you're right about this boy developing into a great rider. Nevertheless, I think I'd rather have a more experienced jockey aboard when I bet my money. Of course, my business prevents me from getting to the track every day, but it's a funny thing that I've never seen young Engel ride a good race. Couldn't you fix it for an older boy?"

"It strikes me that you're sorter spoiled, Mr. Kellar. It's kinder nervy, ain't it, findin' fault with the rider Woolsey puts on his horse, just because you happen to want to bet on that horse? And particularly when we've had that same horse pulled a couple of times, and we're not even puttin' up a cent for the old man?"

Kellar laughed indulgently.

"I suppose you're right, Steve. But we can remedy that. Why not bet a hundred for old Woolsey? That will more than make him even for anything we've done to him. Tell him you'll do that if he'll let you choose a rider for Silverton in the handicap. Then you might get Clancy the mount."

Holland was obviously disappointed.

"It's too bad you won't stand for that boy Engel," he said ruefully. "I'd like to have you watch him once when you're interested in him winnin'. It'd make all the difference in the world. You'd see the matter as I do, then. He's a good rider, sir, and there's absolutely no doubt he'd give us his best."

"So will Clancy."

"Ye-s-s, if there's a bet down for him on the good thing."

"There will be." Kellar's manner was decisive. He was a man of large affairs in the mercantile world, and his decisions were generally final, once he

had resolved on any definite course of action. He rose to go.

"I'm going up to my club for luncheon. There'll be plenty of time for you to arrange this business between now and Christmas—that's a week from tomorrow. I'm tired of the races, anyway, for a while, and I won't be over to the track until Monday. I'm scouting for a government coffee contract, and pretty busy. If anything important comes up, phone me."

"I will," promised Holland. "And bring a bundle with you when you come. On a holiday you can bet 'em as high as you please. That's the day when the public foots the bills."

CHAPTER V.

Two days before Christmas the storm broke. The sun came out from behind a bank of fleecy clouds, presaging a perfect day for the big handicap, and Steve Holland phoned his employer that everything was in readiness for their coup. The track was drying out rapidly except along the rail, where the water had run off the inclined surface and settled, and here the mud would be deep and heavy for a day or two longer. Every indication tended toward the bringing out of the largest crowd of the racing season, with subsequent financial emolument to the track followers. And when, true to prediction, Christmas Day dawned after the glorious fashion of Christmas morning on the California coast, there was but one fly in Steve Holland's ointment, and that was a very small fly indeed.

The public and the newspapers agreed that the rich Christmas Handicap would fall either to the owner of Filbert, the favorite, a handsome product of Rancho Del Paso, or to the man in whose colors Greenwich would go to the post.

Steve Holland hugged to himself delightedly the knowledge that his tools, Morán and Levens, had the mounts respectively on the first and second choices. With the two most dangerous contenders out of the way, he would have been perfectly happy had he not feared the fast but faint-hearted Moonstone, pitchforked in, as all the pro-

fessional tipsters agreed, at ninety-eight pounds.

Holland would have preferred that Fritz Engel, secured to ride Moonstone at the eleventh hour because of having been released from his engagement to ride Silverton, had retained his mount on that horse, with which Holland and Kellar hoped to "kill the ring." Privately, he cursed Kellar's obstinacy, which had resulted in the cancellation of that very engagement.

"I hope Fritz doesn't show him something in the riding line that we won't care to see," he mused, as he awaited his employer at the paddock gate.

Kellar had come over to the track on the twelve-o'clock boat, and presently he appeared at the trysting place. They conversed for a few minutes quite casually, and then the merchant drifted away to the betting ring, strolling idly about, watching the crowd and the bookmakers getting ready for the day's business.

When the first race was called, he went over into the infield, displaying in the race neither more nor less interest than that of the casual visitor to the track.

Only when the third race had been run, and the prices for the next event, the Christmas Handicap, were being posted on the blackboards in the ring, did Kellar take any part in the day's sport. He was in the ring when the first prices appeared on the slates, and a satisfied smile overspread his handsome features as he noticed that Silverton opened at twenty to one. A few minutes later he was thirty to one; whereupon Kellar went to a man who was leaning against a post, jostled him, and stealthily passed him a thick bale of currency.

"Don't be afraid to bet it," he whispered. "Take this line and get it down fast. I'll begin at the other end."

Similar instructions were issued to two other men who waited close by, only they were directed to the far side of the ring.

Fifteen minutes later, when the bugle called the horses to the post, Kellar detached himself from the crowd and

hung about the paddock gate. To him there came his three discreet friends, handed him sheaves of tickets, and disappeared again in the surging throng. Between them they had scattered five thousand dollars about the ring, and Silverton's price had been rubbed so often that he went to the post at three to one.

Kellar stood to win nearly thirty thousand dollars if his combination worked out as per program. He whistled softly under his breath as he walked down to the clubhouse inclosure, there to watch the cooked-up event which some racing reporter would be certain to refer to next morning as "the sport of kings."

The Christmas Handicap was at a mile and a quarter, and eight lordly equines, groomed to the brightness of polished metal and trained to the minute, pranced and curvetted proudly from the paddock. Filbert, in addition to Moran, idolized by racegoers as the best jockey of his day—carried red and white ribbons intertwined in his mane and tail. They were tributes of love from his adoring and confident groom.

The fact that Filbert had up one hundred and twenty-six pounds failed to detract in the slightest degree from his popularity in the betting ring. Hadn't they seen him romp home to victory time and time again against the pick of the handicap division, with even more weight on his back? True, he had never been asked to go a mile and a quarter, but the blood lines of his British sire showed no weak strain. Why should he not go as fast and as far as any other horse? Why, indeed?

That Greenwich could carry one hundred and eighteen pounds and go the route handily there was not the slightest question. The green and gold of his millionaire owner had once been carried over the cup distance to victory by this same candidate, and there was no reason to fear mistakes with him on the part of Levens, for horse and boy were old comrades. If the proud red and white was to be humbled that day, the crowd looked to Greenwich to do the job. In fact, the bookmakers found the

demand for Greenwich tickets almost as brisk as that for the pasteboards reading "Filbert." Three to one was an offer against him at post time.

Fritz Engel's meteoric career during the past four weeks had gained him a following that bet on him blindly. Had he been astride a maiden in this classic event he would have been accorded the tribute of hearty support.

Moonstone, himself a meteoric performer, was the hero of many a reversal of form. Though sometimes the whipper-in of a sorry field, he had been known to lower the colors of more than one sterling racer.

This was his first appearance in stake company. Six to one had been offered on him until the heavy play developed on Silverton, during which the price on Moonstone had gradually drifted to ten. Filbert's original price of six to five had expanded to two to one. Greenwich had also gone up a point, for he opened at two to one. The other contestants ranged in price from fifteen to fifty to one, for the public expected little of them.

William Larue and his family were standing on the lawn before the clubhouse, just inside the fence, in order to be as close as possible to the track. As the parade of aristocratic thoroughbreds filed by, Helen Larue suddenly waved her program excitedly, and Kellar, standing on the clubhouse steps, heard her exclaim:

"Oh, daddy, look! There's Freddy on Moonstone. O-o-o-oh, Freddy! Good luck!"

Her lovely face was flushed with excitement, and Kellar, who prided himself on being a superior judge of beautiful women, craned his neck for a better view of the girl.

"By gad!" he muttered admiringly, as he saw Fritz Engel, bowing and smiling delightedly, wave his whip at the group on the lawn, "if that's the girl Burrell says the boy is gone on, I don't blame him for it. By George! she's a little beauty, and a lady from heel to feather. I must hunt myself up an introduction before I do anything else."

"That'll cost you twenty-five dollars,

you Dutch lobster," shouted Starter Muller, as Fritz Engel, wheeling suddenly with Moonstone, made a run at the barrier. "You're learnin' too cussed fast for an apprentice. You line up, there—quick! It'll cost you fifty if you try it again."

Fritz grinned a trifle foolishly. All the boys were trying to beat the barrier, but Fritz, being a green rider, was a trifle too precipitate. Already he had made two false breaks, from which it will be seen that he had profited greatly by his brief experience as a race rider, even at the price of an occasional fine.

"Watch me—don't watch each other," was the inevitable morsel of advice dispensed to the jockeys by the starter, and Fritz had not been slow to see its value.

It requires an unusually cool head and a mind of great singleness of purpose to enable a jockey to withdraw his attention from his opponents at so critical a moment as the start of a race, where a fraction of a second's advantage is worth possibly several lengths at a later period of the contest. But Fritz was equal to the emergency. He had already learned to watch the man that released the gate—by a sudden jerk at a cord attached to a trigger—and, although the starter held his hands behind his back, a slight tautening of his body or an indefinable expression of countenance frequently telegraphed his intention to "let them go." Occasionally Fritz caused his mount to break too soon, and hence suffered punishment for his eagerness.

Because Moonstone carried but ninety-eight pounds, Fritz was determined to make the most of his pull in the weights. Should he secure a flying start and get away in the lead, he could pick his going, choose the partially dried paths in the track, and thus put upon his opponents the burden of catching a lightly handicapped horse with this additional advantage.

When he returned to the post he turned his horse behind the bunch and edged as far from the rail as he could without drawing upon himself the attention of the starter.

As he sidled into line, his eyes on the

starter's face, he realized that the opportune moment had come. He decided to risk another fine, and, with a cluck and a boot, he gave Moonstone his head at the very instant that the barrier flew upward and Muller voiced his hoarse: "Come on!"

An exceptionally quick breaker, Moonstone was fairly in his stride as the barrier was sprung. He slipped between the horses on each side of him as if he had been greased, and before the rest of the field had settled to their work Moonstone was three lengths to the good.

Crouched low over the horse's withers, arms extended on either side of his neck, hands lightly gripping the reins and moving forward and back, forward and back, in perfect rhythm with every stride, Fritz guided Moonstone away from the heavy going next the rail out to where the track was dry and comparatively "fast." He made but slight effort to restrain his eager mount, for he desired that the pace should be fast—just as fast as Moonstone could make it and keep up his gait. So long as the horse was under wraps, however slight, he would carry his speed and not tire himself too much. Without appreciable effort, therefore, they raced along, passing the grand stand with its frenzied, shouting thousands, five lengths in front.

Moran, despite his instructions to lay away with Filbert, moved out of the bunch, and, rounding the clubhouse turn, he, and Levens, on Greenwich, began to close on the leader. Neither was aware of the other's plans, but each was certain that the early move would not be beneficial to his heavily weighted mount.

To Fritz, waiting in front, his years of experience as an exercise boy proved of immense advantage. Twenty-five seconds, fair time through the loose mud, he figured, had elapsed during the run through the stretch; twenty-six more saw him around the turn, and Moonstone had not faltered in his stride. He was going as blithely as at the start. Fritz wanted to look back, but he dared not, so he strained his young ears for news of his opponents. He could hear more than one horse closing on him.

"Stead-d-y, boy," he whispered to Moonstone, never for the fraction of a second relinquishing his slight restraint of the horse. Turning into the back stretch, Filbert and Greenwich were close at his heels, and at the half-mile pole they caught him. Still Fritz sat snug.

"Three-quarters in one-seventeen. We're stepping some," was the thought that swept through the jockey's mind, and just then a horse's head drew up past his knees, and he felt the hot breath of the flying racer on his hands.

"I've got you now, Dutchy," sneered Moran. "Gangway for a real rider."

With a blow of his bat, he sought to urge Filbert into the lead.

"That goat of yours has quit," he teased, casting a quick glance at the horse with the streak of yellow.

Even as he looked, Fritz touched Moonstone with his heel, and the horse shot ahead, leaving the favorite floundering in the heavy going where Moran had forced him when attempting to pass.

But Moran had no desire to take the lead with the idea of winning. Far from it. He wished merely to race Moonstone into submission, so that Silverton, carrying the commission of the conspirators, would find him easy picking when Clancy saw fit to make his move.

Levens, unlike Moran, cared not who won. *He* was there to lose, that was all, and he proceeded to do so with the best possible grace. Seemingly seeking to save ground by a short turn, and so reach the path in front of Moonstone, he pulled into the deep mud close to the rail, where, after stumbling along for a furlong on even terms with Moonstone, Greenwich's tail twitched skyward, and the horse was done.

But even as Greenwich dropped behind, hopelessly beaten, and Filbert, stretched to the last limit of his endurance, failed to keep pace with Moonstone, the faint-hearted one gave indication of his inherent desire to quit. His ears flattened against his neck, and Fritz's heart sank, in the knowledge that

while his mount had reserve speed sufficient to win, Filbert, the lion-hearted, was close enough to outgame him through the stretch.

Moonstone was not particularly tired, and there was no reason for his stopping; nevertheless, he evidently was minded to do so. The elimination of the indomitable Greenwich had heartened him for a moment as he sprang away, leaving the choices anchored in the mud, but as they skimmed past the quarter pole Fritz wondered if the beast would last. They were still a long way from home.

As they made the turn into the stretch, the boy's quick ear warned him that the final struggle was on at last. The thud of hoofs and the rapid, gasping exhalations of a laboring horse sounded closer and closer. Silverton, under Clancy's vigorous urging, was making his run.

"Mile in one-forty-four," muttered Fritz. "We only walked around that turn."

Steadily Silverton gained. A splash of mud from Moonstone's flying hoofs rose upward before him and spattered on Clancy's cheek; a second later, a similar shower almost blinded him, but Silverton did not falter. He knew what was expected of him, and on he plodded.

"This hound will never stand for the bat," thought Fritz, "and every ounce counts now." He unclasped his fingers and allowed his whip to fall to the ground. If he would win, it must be by sheer horsemanship and an innate knowledge of Moonstone's peculiar mental make-up. The brute must be humored to the very finish.

Past the drawgate they flashed. Moonstone was less than a length in the lead, and once more he wanted to stop; but it was no longer because of lack of courage. He was, in truth, a tired horse now, but with velvety hands the boy coaxed him on, crooning softly to the beast as a mother heartens a timid child.

The horse responded nobly, and, with eyes flashing with the lust of battle, nostrils red and wide-flung, he gave of the best that was in him. The faint heart was trying nobly, but he must not be

called upon to do more, else, in sheer disgust at the outrageous request, he refuse to try further. In that supreme moment the heart of the courageous boy went out to his struggling mount. How well he understood!

A sixteenth of a mile to go, and Moonstone seemed to be crawling! Clancy swung his whip, and once more Fritz felt the hot breath of the pursuer on the back of his leg. That warm, recurrent blast passed over him, inch by inch forging ahead. Now Fritz felt it on his hand, outstretched beside Moonstone's neck, and cautiously, very cautiously, the lad took a slightly tighter hold on the reins, feeling out his mount. The craven was not yet done!

But Silverton was at his shoulder now, and ten long yards still stretched between Moonstone and the finish. Fritz was part of his horse. Like Moonstone's own muscles, his lithe little body moved in unison with the horse's every stride. He feared to breathe. He merely crouched and held up Moonstone's head and waited for the finish, while now there came to him the hoarse, mighty roar of a multitude gone mad. It swelled above him like the crest of some giant tidal wave, freighted with the hopes, the fears, the tragedies of life.

The gallant Silverton staggered on. His eyes, bright and black and staring, shone for an instant on Fritz. Another stride, and Silverton glared in at the window of Moonstone's little soul, which shrank and blanched and hid. A final prolonged roar, that somehow resembled a great sigh, broke from the crowd.

The goal was reached!

Nostril to nostril they flashed past the sighting line, and Fritz, quivering hysterically, pulled up and trotted back to the stand where thirty thousand human beings had gone wild, ramping, stamping mad. He glanced at the figures on the electric board.

A double O—dead heat!

As Fritz Engel came out of the weighing room under the pagoda, the waning shouts of the crowd swelled again into a wild howl of admiration. He walked unconcernedly up the track toward the

paddock gate, where Larue met him. The lanky Tennessean fell upon the boy with a glad shout of welcome, lifted him in his arms, and swung him high above his head.

"Look over there—to the grand stand, sonny," he yelled. "They're waving at you."

He set the boy on the ground, removed the brave silk cap and ruffled the crimson hair with bearlike affection. Not a dollar of Larue's money had been wagered on the outcome of the race. It was merely the joy and pride of the clean, true sportsman—the born lover of grit and skill in man or beast—that moved him to say fervently:

"You little red mick! I knew you could ride. I wouldn't have missed that finish for a farm."

"You got a bargain in that lad, Larue."

Larue turned, and faced "Dutch" Engel. The German's dark face was pale with excitement and disappointed greed. With the instinct of the miser, he thought not of the golden future in store for the boy, and, consequently, for himself. He thought only of the few paltry dollars for which he had exchanged a prince of riders.

"Sir," snapped the Southerner coldly, "I never trade in human flesh and blood, but I'll give you five thousand dollars to relinquish your adoption claim on this little fellow."

Engel laughed sneeringly, and walked away. It was not given to him to understand many things beyond money and horses, but he did know a premier jockey. He had just seen one.

Fritz slipped his hand confidingly in Larue's. "Pop," he said. It was the first time he had used the word; it came from him freely, naturally, the soul cry of a heart despoiled and hungering for the human regard which now, for the first time in all his bitter life, he saw within reach. The rancher's big heart expanded. He had had a boy of his own once, and "Pop," that homely little synonym of filial regard, touched with healing tenderness a spot that must always be raw and bleeding.

"Yes, son," he responded. "What is it?"

"I'm glad I'm your boy."

Steve Holland came out of the paddock and approached Kellar with a contemptuous "I-told-you-so" sort of grin on his red, freckled face.

"Well?" he demanded, and added irritably: "I was afraid of this, Mr. Kellar. I knew he was a wonderful rider."

Kellar looked at his man, a puzzled expression in his eyes. He seemed to have difficulty in realizing just what Holland was saying. In fact, he hardly saw Holland. Instead, there still danced before him the vision of a flushed, eager girl, clasping and unclasping her hands nervously; a bell-like voice calling: "Freddy! Freddy! Come on, Freddy, come on!" was still sounding in his ears.

Holland returned his stare rather stupidly. He had never seen Kellar in defeat before, and the contempt of the gambler for the poor loser was evident in his shifty blue eyes, although his voice was smooth and ingratiating as ever.

"You look like you'd lost your last red cent," he remarked jocularly, in an endeavor to hearten his employer. "But it ain't gone yet—not by a long shot!"

"What isn't gone?" asked Kellar dully.

"Your five thousand."

"Oh—that! I wasn't thinking of it at all."

Holland stared, surprised. Kellar's moods were very frequently beyond his comprehension.

"Well, it's safe enough, anyhow; that is, if you put up another five thousand on Moonstone. We average six to one for what we wagered on Silverton, and can afford to cover up at even money or better on the other horse. In fact, you might bet more than five thousand and stand to win whichever way the cat jumps. I think the public will make Silverton favorite in the run-off, but I hardly believe he'll win. He's a tired horse."

"Nonsense," reproved Kellar, coming back to earth at last, "you're too easily

frightened, Steve. I'll let the tail go with the hide."

"All right," growled Holland. "You can toss off yours, if you wish, but hedge my bit out."

Accompanied by Larue, the owner of Moonstone applied at the door of the jockey room for permission to speak to Fritz Engel. When the boy appeared, they questioned him eagerly.

"Old Woolsey, who owns Silvertown, refuses to split the purse. He insists on running it off," explained the owner. "What chance do you think Moonstone will have?"

"The best in the world, sir. I think he'll win."

"Don't be so positive unless you have good reason to think so, sonny," warned Larue.

"But I feel that way, sir. The old dog tried to sulk and quit all through the last three furlongs, but I didn't give him any excuse. Before that he was just buck-jumping. I never let him down until Silvertown made his run, and I don't think the horse can be so darned tired."

"Silvertown was gaining very fast at the finish," argued the owner.

"I know. But he shot his bolt when he made that run. He won't get within two lengths of Moonstone when we run it over. I think we'll win by ourselves."

"The boy talks like a book. Sounds reasonable, too." Larue nodded his acquiescence.

"All right, Engel," agreed Moonstone's owner, apparently satisfied. "We'll go at 'em again. And if you win there's a hundred dollars in it for you."

"It's as good as in my pocket," replied the jockey.

The deciding heat of the Christmas Handicap, run off after the final race of the regular program, proved the wisdom of Fritz's conclusions. Moonstone led all the way, and won, pulled up, by half a dozen lengths.

Kellar watched him as he flashed by the judges' stand.

"Well, it's cost me something to get wise to you, young man," he soliloquized, as he stowed his field glasses in

their case, "but I'll make you pay it back before the season closes."

CHAPTER VI.

Five minutes after Fritz Engel came out of the jockey room arrayed in his street clothes, in the pocket of which, by the way, there now jingled five double eagles, Moran met him as he was crossing through the almost deserted betting ring. As the apprentice replied to the nod of the premier rider, he was aware that Moran's attitude toward him had undergone a decided change. His glance was no longer scornful, and there was marked respect in his tone as he greeted Fritz.

"Well, you're the real thing now, Engel," he remarked, not without a trace of jealousy in his manner. "Everybody says you put up a great ride on Moonstone. You're doing pretty well, for a kid. Make any money on the side?"

"A hundred," Fritz hastened to confess. He was just a little proud of himself, and saw no reason why he should conceal the fact that Moonstone's owner had made him a present. Nevertheless, he was surprised that Moran should have asked him such a question.

The premier jockey arched his eyebrows and wagged his head solemnly.

"Huh-huh," he acquiesced. "He didn't break himself at that. Well, never mind, Fritz. You'll pick up many an extra hundred from now on. They'll all be after you. By the way"—here Moran's manner suddenly became confidential—"I bet every cent I had on Filbert." He lied. His money was on Silvertown. "I'm absolutely cleaned. I thought he'd win, sure. I've simply got to have a hundred dollars to-night, Fritz, and I want you to do me a favor. I've got a diamond ring here, Fritz. It cost me a hundred and fifty, and I was going to give it to—some one for Christmas, but I guess she'll have to wait until I win another race. Why don't you buy it? You know you can't lose on diamonds, and this here's a bargain. If you happen to have a friend yourself, now, this ring'd be a mighty nice thing to give her."

He held out the little sparkler, and gazed at the younger boy anxiously. Even Fritz, inexperienced as he was, realized that Moran was worried and desperate for money. He took the ring in his hand and gazed at it with exaggerated solemnity, the while a nebulous notion that it would look exceedingly well on Helen Larue's finger began to take definite form in his unsophisticated red head. Moran, quick to perceive an inclination on Fritz's part to consider his proposition, unconsciously added the impetus necessary to transfuse the hazy notion into a firm decision.

"Give me a hundred for the ring, and if you haven't disposed of it by New Year, I'll buy it back for a hundred and a quarter. I've simply got to raise some money to-night."

"All right," replied Fritz; "only I don't think you'll get it back. I'm going to give it to Miss Larue for Christmas. She's a dandy girl, and she's been awfully good to me."

"Fine idea." Moran pocketed the coin. "Much obliged. See you to-morrow, old man."

Fritz watched him as he strolled down the board walk to the gate, where he was joined by a particularly loud and expensively dressed young woman. Even at that distance Fritz could see that she was chewing gum. He disliked her for it. Helen Larue never chewed gum.

Helen was seated, with her mother, in the living room of their cottage in Golden Gate when Fritz came in from the track. He ran up the front steps two at a time, for he could hardly wait until he was in their presence to receive at first hand their affectionate praise and rejoicing at his marvelous ride on the despised Moonstone.

Helen heard him coming, and ran to the door to meet him. But Fritz had already entered the room and paused there, beaming, his russet countenance turned to a deeper red from the exercise and the pleasure Helen's presence always afforded him.

"Well," he cried eagerly, "I guess I didn't make 'em sit up and take notice, eh, Miss Helen!" He grinned mischievously. "I wish you could have seen

Dutch Engel's face when I met him outside the jockey room an hour ago. I thought he was going to murder me."

The girl came close to him and put her arm around his neck impulsively.

"Oh, Freddy," she said, "we're so proud of you. You're a perfect wonder," and in her enthusiasm she pressed a sisterly kiss on his freckled cheek.

The furniture in the room seemed to Fritz to be flying topsy-turvy as Helen released him. To the girl, that sisterly caress meant nothing but a natural, feminine notification of the pride and affection which she felt for a frail, undersized little lad, who had not failed of the faith reposed in him. But sadness and suffering have a queer habit of transforming boys into men years before their time, and while it is of record that Mrs. Larue also kissed Fritz, it is not of record that Fritz was aware of the fact. He was staring at Helen with a glance not exactly boyish, and their words of praise came to his ears unheeded.

Later, when Mrs. Larue had left the room, Helen and the boy sat before the hearth to talk over the events of the day. But Fritz's tongue had lost its Irish facility. Evidently he had on his mind something of far more importance than the Christmas Handicap, and presently Helen observed that he was a trifle distract.

"What's on your mind, Freddy?" she asked him.

"It ain't on my mind at all," flashed Fritz, suddenly getting a grip on his native blarney, "it's here—in my pocket. I have something for you, Miss Helen—a little Christmas present—"

He took her hand awkwardly and slipped the ring on her finger.

"You see—I—I—well, Miss Helen, you're the only girl—"

He got no further. The woman in Helen Larue sensed the boy's trouble, even while he struggled bashfully to express himself. She recalled the hot flush, the confusion that had followed her kiss, and the memory of a dozen little acts of adoration, unnoticed at the time, recurred to her now with a new significance. Was it possible that this

dear, absurd boy could be in love with her? She glanced quickly at the diamond, then into Fritz's adoring eyes—and understood. It would have been too ridiculous to permit him to finish what Helen intuitively knew was a boyish declaration of love. She was sorry now that she had kissed him. It had precipitated matters. He did not understand. After all, how could he, since he was only a dear, foolish little boy?

"That's awfully good of you, Freddy," she said kindly. "I am very much honored, indeed. It was so nice of you to want to give me a Christmas present, but when you're older you'll understand why I cannot accept your little gift. Young ladies cannot accept diamond rings from young gentlemen, Freddy, unless they're engaged to be married, and, of course, we're not going to be married, or even sweethearts, so you see how it is, don't you? But," she hastened to add, as she saw the glad light die out of his gray eyes, "if you'll take this ring back where you bought it and induce the jeweler to return the money you paid for it, you can give me something far less expensive, and I'll appreciate it every bit as much. Suppose I go with you, Freddy, and pick out my own present?"

"All right, Miss Helen," Fritz managed to reply. "I didn't understand. That is, I thought perhaps—"

"There's a dear boy, Freddy. I knew you'd understand that I didn't intend to hurt you. I would value a little gift from you very much indeed, and tomorrow morning, if you wish, we'll go shopping together. Here comes daddy. Better run upstairs and comb your hair before dinner."

And Fritz, knowing perfectly well that his rebellious hair was plastered down on his scalp as flat as moist hair can ever be plastered by brush and comb, realized that she was offering him an opportunity to escape from an embarrassing predicament. He fled upstairs and did not descend until he had himself in hand. Larue noticed his preoccupation during dinner, but attributed it to nervousness after the exciting events of the day.

CHAPTER VII.

Robert P. Kellar was a perfect type of that division of the human family which has reached its highest state of development during the past twenty-five years. He was a business man—a money getter. Handsome, brainy, well educated, and ambitious, he possessed, in addition to a remarkable ability for making money in a legitimate way, an equally remarkable love for acquiring it by dubious methods.

The fields just beyond are always greenest, and through some kink in Kellar's moral make-up the placid and tame acquisition of money brought him no joy. This, despite the fact that he was fond of money for money's sake—for the creature comforts it provided. The instinct of the criminal was in his blood. He would sooner have made a dollar by trick and device, with a certain element of danger attached, than make five dollars by legitimate methods.

His was a queer code. He would rather lose his right hand than repudiate a just bill, yet in the accumulation of wealth and power he was as ruthless and remorseless as a tiger. With Kellar the means mattered not at all. It was results that counted with him. Kellar was that type of man who would steal quite cheerfully from Peter to pay Paul—and think nothing of it.

Early in life he had started in the tea and coffee business in a modest way, and had early learned to look with complaisant eye upon commissions and rake-offs to cooks, restaurant stewards, and others upon whose favor he depended for orders. He denounced the practice as a holdup; yet he was always the first to take advantage of it. He forced money upon people who never thought to ask it, nor looked upon it as a bribe. Rather Kellar clothed the transaction with a halo of righteousness and figured upon it as an item of legitimate expense to his business—something to be deplored, like high rentals, but withal vitally necessary to success.

In time he had outgrown the retail trade and become an importer. He prospered, and the acquisition of money

served but to whet his appetite for more. Naturally of a sporting and adventurous nature, he dabbled in speculation with his surplus. Real estate proved remunerative but slow.

Then Kellar's overstimulated nerves twitched for quicker action, and he took to visiting the race track, the one place on earth, with the exception of the stock exchange, where action is calculated to be speedy enough for the most exacting.

Here by chance he had become acquainted with Steve Holland, a "one-horse owner," out of luck and bedeviled by feed men. In a moment of desperate financial travail, which for the moment reduced him to the level of a mere tout, Holland had gone to Kellar with a morsel of straight stable information, stipulating that the merchant should bet a few dollars for him, Holland, in return for the tip.

Shrewd judge of men and motives that he was, Kellar sensed a desire on the part of Holland to get close up. He spread a thousand dollars "across the board" in the local handbooks, thus securing "closing odds," which in this particular race happened to be greater than the opening prices. The killing was to be too flagrant to invite disaster to the owners of the horse by a heavy play at the track, and, as a result, the pool rooms all over the country had borne the brunt of the slaughter.

That heavy winning—it ran into the neighborhood of eight thousand dollars—had resulted in an understanding between Steve Holland and Robert Kellar. Holland, recognizing in Kellar a born plunger with a bank roll, was quick to see, after this first experience, that he might fatten on the crumbs that dropped from Kellar's table; and, being a subservient, crafty dog, he decided to be on hand when they fell. On the other hand, Kellar, reading Holland for the shifty, unscrupulous crook that he was, was equally quick to see in the horseman a most valuable ally. He outlined his proposition bluntly.

"My money is necessary to you, Holland," he explained, "and your knowledge of track methods and horses is es-

sential to me. I guess we understand each other. I'm not boob enough to play blindman's buff on a horse race. I want them fixed, and I don't care how you fix 'em. Show me a sure thing, Holland, and I'll bet them as high as the table, and split with you, fair and square. Give me a double cross, and I'll get you if it breaks me. Now, what's the first method of procedure?"

"I want a stable of my own," replied Holland promptly. "I must have standing at the track, and I can't get it on one horse, and him a cripple four days in the week. I should have four or five horses running in my name. We can pick up a bunch of skates in the selling races."

Within a week, Steve Holland had his racing stable, and from the day that he and Kellar struck their bargain, both prospered. The merchant never visited the stables, and only came to the race track on occasions when Holland gave him the word. Even at such times he seldom undertook to get his bets down in the books himself. He had three trusted betting commissioners who were not even known to Steve Holland.

Upon the few occasions when Kellar went to the trouble of helping to place his own bets, the bookies looked upon him merely as a "good customer"—a man who bet heavily simply because he could afford to. They were aware that he was an infrequent visitor to the track, and to many of them he was known as a staid and respectable business man.

In his greed for gain he sometimes fell foul of some cunning turf follower, quick to spot an embryo plunger. The results were varying. Not infrequently he wagered considerable sums on horses which, in the vernacular of the track, were notorious "goats." Hence, upon the occasions when his long shots landed, the pencilers merely cursed, and attributed it to fool luck.

Yes, Robert P. Kellar was a business man, not a gambler. He never spent a dollar unless he saw two more in sight, or thought he did. In his periods of secret relaxation he was a sport, not a sportsman.

This was the Kellar that Steve Hol-

land knew and worked for. The Kellar that the world knew was the keen, brilliant business man who never contracted a debt he didn't pay; member of the most exclusive clubs in town, legitimate prey for designing mothers with marriageable daughters. This latter was the Kellar who, some few days following the running of the Christmas Handicap, contrived, through a mutual acquaintance, to secure a formal introduction to Mrs. Larue and Helen, as they were standing by the rail close to the judges' stand talking to a young man.

The young man was introduced to Kellar as Judge Moncure, and even as the two shook hands, murmuring the usual commonplaces, Kellar permitted his interest in the girl to be supplanted for a minute by his interest in Judge Moncure. The judge was about twenty-eight years old, and dressed in much the same quiet good taste as Kellar himself. He was not even good-looking, but had a long, honest face, like a horse, and a grip that told of muscles of iron covering his big, bony frame.

Kellar glanced up into the glass-paneled pagoda where Judge Beek and Judge Scriven had already taken their places, and where Moncure was preparing to join them. The incongruity of personalities reflected in the faces of the trio was plainly apparent.

"I'll bet they never agree on anything," was Kellar's thought, as, after the exchange of a few polite words with the little party, Moncure lifted his hat to the ladies and climbed the stairs to the judges' stand.

Kellar noted, with a sudden, angry twinge of jealousy, that as Judge Moncure left, his friendly, impersonal glance rested upon Helen Larue with more than friendly interest. Just before he disappeared into the pagoda, he turned and smiled back over his shoulder—a smile that Helen returned tenfold.

"This is Judge Moncure's first day in the stand," Helen explained to Kellar, who was staring after Moncure. "He's been racing secretary heretofore."

"Why did they shift him?" asked Kellar idly. "I should think he'd prefer the

position of racing secretary to that of judge. The best he can earn for himself up there is the same salary, plus the criticism of a disgruntled public."

"Oh, he's still racing secretary—he's just helping out in the stand for a few weeks," replied Helen.

"Hum!" Kellar grew suddenly thoughtful. It came to him that a crooked rider would receive short shrift at the hands of Judge Moncure, and he made a mental note to talk the matter over with Holland.

The little party kept its stand by the fence until after the first race had been run.

"We always come down to the rail to watch the finish of all the races in which Fritz Engel has a mount," Helen explained to Kellar. "Papa has him under contract until he's twenty-one. He lives with us, you know, and we're terribly fond of him. He tells us that when he knows we are watching him at the finish he feels he simply has to win. He's the dearest boy in the world."

"I understand he's a wonderful rider," Kellar replied disinterestedly.

"He's better than that. He's honest—as honest as Judge Moncure; and papa says there isn't as much honesty around the race track as there used to be."

"I take it, then, that your father is one of the old school, Miss Larue," Kellar responded.

"He is," replied Helen. "He raises horses, and races them for the pure love of the sport. Are you an owner, Mr. Kellar?"

"Gracious, no," laughed Kellar. "I like automobiles better. I'm the saddest of all created creatures, Miss Larue. I'm a business man, and it seems that coffee is about the only thing I know anything about. I get tired of the grind—coffee grounds, if you will—and run over here once or twice a week for relaxation. I bet a few dollars; not for profit, but rather to stimulate my interest in the race."

When Kellar chose to do so, he could be a most entertaining companion. He carried with him an atmosphere of ready money, of careless ease, and half hu-

morous indulgence. He had the trick of causing women to look upon him as a very devil of a fellow, while his stock of little worldly arts and graces, the manner in which he opened a door for a woman, or lifted his hat gave the lie to this impression, though still permitting it to exist. Such men are always more or less fascinating to women, and Mrs. Larue and Helen were readily impressed by his charming presence.

After the first race had been run, he asked, and received, permission to escort them to their seats in the clubhouse veranda. In the face of Mrs. Larue's maternal watchfulness, however, Kellar was too clever a tactician not to devote himself equally to mother and daughter. Moreover, he had the good taste not to wear out his welcome, and after the third race he excused himself and made his adieu.

"What an extremely pleasant man!" commented Mrs. Larue, as she watched him depart. "His manners are perfect, and evidently he is quite wealthy."

But Helen did not hear her. She was glancing out over the heads of the crowd, watching Judge Moncure standing between the other two judges in the pagoda, and evidently expostulating with them about something.

At the close of the day's sport, Kellar adroitly managed to be passing with his auto in time to intercept Helen and Mrs. Larue on the board walk leading to the exit.

"I'm just in time to pick you up and carry you home," he hailed them genially. Before they had an opportunity either to accept or decline the invitation, Kellar had stopped the car, leaped out, and stood holding open the door of the tonneau. From long practice, he had the trick of doing it gracefully, modestly.

Mrs. Larue, it must be confessed, had a penchant for motoring. It was one of the few real trials of her unruffled married life that her husband refused to purchase a car. He was too thorough a horseman, and distrusted motors. He preferred a dashing team and the family surrey, to supplant which, with a thing of purely mechanical intelligence, bordered close on sacrilege.

Glad, therefore, of the opportunity for a swift, exhilarating ride home and a consequent escape from the crush of the eager crowds waiting for the trolley, Mrs. Larue thanked him, with a smile, and stepped into the tonneau. As Helen followed her, Kellar touched his cap in humorous imitation of the professional chauffeur.

"Where to, lady?" he inquired.

Mrs. Larue gave him the address. "Good," he replied. "We'll go home the longest way, if you don't mind."

Half an hour later he set them down in front of their cottage in Golden Gate. He half hoped for an invitation to call, knowing that on such short acquaintance he would not receive it; yet, as he lifted his hat and drove away, his busy brain was already involved with plans for the siege of Helen Larue's heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Money makes the mob howl, even if it didn't make the mare go," remarked Judge Scriven. He was a puffy, round-faced, self-satisfied little man, and as his cold gray eyes shifted from the crowd which clamored around the glass-paneled pagoda to the two men who occupied the stand with him, disgust and contempt for the raging public was written on his countenance.

"Well, you'd howl, too, Scriven, if you'd lost your money on such a dirty deal as those fellows just got," retorted Judge Moncure indignantly, pointing to the favorite in the race just decided. The mare was finishing in a canter, many lengths behind the field.

The track police shouldered their way through the rabble, threatening here, warning there. Finally they seized upon the loudest of the protestants and hurried him from the inclosure.

"I'm satisfied that Moran got left with that mare on purpose," continued Moncure, as the mob, now effectually cowed, made its way slowly and angrily to the betting ring; its anger, as is the custom with race-track mobs, spending itself quickly by reason of the fever of speculation and the half-formed hope of recouping on the coming race.

"I can't understand why you make such a charge," warned Judge Scriven, who was the presiding judge. "What would the boss say if he heard you?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Moncure, "and I don't care. But I believe the boss is a good enough sport to look into the matter at least. It's a shame, Scriven, the way that boy Moran is allowed to go on. Just because he's a crackajack rider is no reason why he should be permitted to rob the public. We should institute an inquiry into that young man's case. He needs looking after very badly."

The presiding judge settled his ample person into his easy-chair, pulled up his trousers to preserve their carefully creased contour, and took a small orange-wood stick from his pocket. Absently he set to work on the nails of his soft white hands.

"What do you think about it?" Moncure demanded, turning suddenly to Judge Beek.

That white-haired old man, who had outlived his usefulness years before, by reason of his failing eyesight, twisted a thin white beard that lent to his wrinkled features a certain goatlike appearance. He was a mild man, and deprecated any talk of fraudulent racing, for the reason that in the mutual recriminations between judges, jockeys, and owners, in the event of a strict investigation, his confrères might catch a glimpse of the truth, to wit: That by reason of his impaired vision he was not competent to sit as a judge.

"I hate to hear you joining in with talk of this sort, Moncure, my boy," he began patronizingly. "There's enough such guff around the track without the judges indulging in it. It has been my experience that there has never been anything wrong once, where there have been a hundred accusations. I used to own a stable myself, and I know that horsemen are the victims of most of the jobbery. They stand in with very little of it."

"I quite agree with you," Moncure replied, "and I haven't the slightest suspicion that the owner of that horse was in on the play. But I do believe

that Moran never intended to win with her. Consequently he must have had a reason for wanting to lose. I tell you, gentlemen, somebody's handling that boy. For some reason or other he loses with nearly all the short-priced horses he rides—frequently putting up an exhibition that would disgrace an apprentice. I notice he comes home with the long shots, though—lands 'em by sheer skill. He's a wonderful rider, but crooked as a bed spring." I'm convinced of it."

"Well, don't you think it's time for us to get busy when the boss mentions the matter?" Scriven put in. He yawned lazily. "What's the use stirring up trouble? The game's getting enough black eyes from the newspapers without us giving them something to squawk about."

Young Moncure eyed his chief with the disdain of the young competent for the aged and careless striving to do work for which they are no longer fitted. He knew that Scriven and Beek were not dishonest, but they had been too long in the harness, and some of the dry rot that was already threatening the racing game in many States had reached them also.

"Then I presume that we're here simply to draw our pay and put up a front? You were a newspaper man once yourself, Scriven. You believe the reporters try to tell the truth about what they see, do you not?"

"Oh, yes. But that's no reason why we should point out to them the things they overlook. You're new to the judges' stand, Moncure. When you've been here as long as I have you'll get over that idea of digging up trouble for yourself."

"No, I won't," retorted the youthful judge. "I'll not stay that long. If I'm expected to lie down and shut my eyes and never speak until I'm punched in the belly like a talking doll, I don't want the job. It's jobs like Willie Moran just put over that are killing the sport in America. Half a dozen States have legislated against racing already. The newspapers are gunning for us. They say the game is rotten, and there's a

hue and cry going up all over the country. Racing is a legitimate recreation, and it must be kept clean if it's to survive. The betting system is all wrong. It isn't the sport of kings any longer; it's the sport of knaves—with an ace in the hole, and I'm not sure that I care to be a judge, feeling as I do about the weeding out of the crooks that are handling the best jockeys at the track."

"Well, there are others who'd care for your job," sneered Scriven. "After all, perhaps you're a better racing secretary than you are a judge. Moran's up on Hannah Girl in this coming race, and she ought to go to the post at even money. Better withhold your judgment, Moncure, until you see how he handles Hannah."

There was nothing particularly weird in the ride Moran gave Hannah Girl. She was away fourth; on the turn she was second; into the stretch she led by two lengths, and came home third in a driving finish.

Judge Scriven turned to Moncure after the winning numbers had been hoisted.

"Well?" he interrogated.

"It fools the crowd," replied Moncure, "but it doesn't fool me. Moran might have won if he'd gone right along with that filly. She could have led all the way."

Scriven turned away pettishly. Judge Beek smiled pityingly. Moncure, angry and disgusted at the two older men, was glad to discontinue the argument. He was looking out through the window, watching Moran and the owner of Hannah Girl. The latter was plainly angry, and Moran was endeavoring to explain.

Moncure's long, shrewd face puckered in a quiet smile. He knew he was on the trail of what was wrong with the racing game, and he had quite made up his mind to run it down. Somewhere behind the scenes a ruthless hand was pulling the strings. To find this hand and banish its owner from the turf forever was the task that Henry Moncure set for himself; and in its consummation he realized that he must expect no aid from his fellow judges.

That evening in San Francisco, Moncure called on the president of the jockey club at his hotel, and laid the entire matter before him. He recounted at length many suspicious circumstances, startling exhibitions of reversals of form, and cited a dozen instances where Moran had won with long-priced horses and failed dismally with favorites.

"I can't place my finger on anything definite," he added, "but I'd like to be relieved as racing secretary for a few weeks, and given a roving commission to run this crook off the turf."

"Go right ahead, my boy," the president replied. "Spare no expense for detectives or assistants of any kind: I'll pay the bills."

That night a private detective was placed on the trail of Jockey Moran, and another began sleuthing his valet.

CHAPTER IX.

In the private dining room at the Poodle Dog Restaurant, in San Francisco, Steve Holland awaited his employer. The trainer had crossed the bay early in the day, and phoned Kellar to meet him, intimating that he had news of importance to communicate. At Kellar's entrance, therefore, Holland entered at once into a discussion of the subject nearest his heart.

"I have news," he began.

"I came to hear it."

"Regarding Engel," continued Holland. "He's about ripe."

"Well, pluck him, pluck him! What makes you think he's ripe?"

"I had a talk with his valet, Jim Burrell, yesterday afternoon. He took my tip, and has conned the kid until he tells him everything he knows. At that I might never have tumbled if it hadn't been for Moran, who was hard up for ready cash after he blew his wad on Silverton. He got wind that old Carthart gave Engel a hundred for his ride on Moonstone, and after the races Moran waited for Engel in the betting ring. He had a diamond ring, and he offered it to Fritz for the hundred, telling him that if he wanted to return it

within a week he would give him a hundred and a quarter for it. Well, Engel bought the ring, and told Moran he was going to give it to Larue's daughter. Yesterday he came back with it, and offered to return it for a hundred. Of course, Moran was wise that the girl had refused the ring. He started kiddin' Fritz before the other boys, and Engel pasted him. Burrell had to interfere to stop the row. He picked the story out of Moran, and then went sympathizin' to Engel, and the whole thing came out. The kid's all broke up about it. Burrell's been playin' the good kind friend, and he's completely in the boy's confidence."

"So far, so good. But Engel stops with Larue and his family, and—"

"That's the point. Old Larue trusts Burrell, and told him only this morning that him and his family's going back to the ranch for a week or two. Burrell and Fritz are to be in charge of the horses. Now's the time to introduce your baby doll."

Kellar smiled. "I'm ready when you and Burrell are. What else do you know?"

"Well, when the Larues leave to go back to the ranch it'll be lonesome for young Engel at nights, and if Burrell suggests a little trip over to the city the kid'll hardly refuse. He's got that hundred back from Moran; I know it, because Moran's valet had to come to me for the money—and Burrell can steer him anywhere you say to meet your blond friend."

"How about Luigi's?" asked Kellar. "It's a free-and-easy joint, and ought to look good to a fresh young fellow like Engel." He paused reflectively. "Yes, Luigi's is the best. What night?"

"Burrell thinks the Larues will go before Thursday. How about Thursday night?"

"I'll have the stage set. Tell Burrell to look for the baby-faced blonde with the winning smile. Thursday night about eleven-thirty. Tell Burrell to bring the boy over to Luigi's. He's to ask for the dago, who will have a table reserved for him. The rest will happen."

As Jim Burrell had predicted to Steve Holland, Larue left the San Pablo track on Wednesday for his ranch in Yolo County, taking Mrs. Larue and Helen with him. The ladies were much concerned at the thought of leaving Fritz behind to shift for himself, but Fritz and Larue laughed away their worry.

"I used to take care of myself when Dutch Engel had me," said Fritz, "and I guess I can make out while you're away. I'll eat at the Irish Kitchen with Burrell."

"Is Burrell quite trustworthy, William?" Mrs. Larue inquired, in a low voice.

"I think so," said Larue. "He's sober and always on the job. I've had him working for me off and on for years, and I've never found anything wrong with him. I've warned him to keep an eye on the boy."

It was characteristic of Larue's honest, direct nature that while he was the last man in the world to suspect chicanery in others he was also the first to visit speedy vengeance on those convicted of it. Burrell had worked too long for Larue not to know this; hence he was always on his good behavior.

Unlike the majority of turf followers who have gradually drifted down the social scale to the most menial job on the track—valet to a jockey—Jim Burrell had accomplished his degradation without flaunting it in public and having it show in his face. He was industrious and obliging without seeming obsequious, and when he desired to get drunk it was his custom to disport himself among strangers, and return to the barn sober and on time. He was wise in the ways of men and horses, and from long association Larue had grown in a considerable measure to depend upon him more than the rancher himself would have suspected.

The explanation satisfied Mrs. Larue, and her husband continued:

"Fritz will look after the running of the horses. They are all fit, and don't need any training, and he knows what exercise to give them. I marked the races in the meeting book for Burrell

to make the entries, and everything will run along smoothly until I get back."

Fritz, eager to be off to the track, there to play at being trainer, declined an invitation to accompany the family to the train. Two weeks before he would have accepted with alacrity, but the bitter finale of his boyish romance was still too fresh in his mind, and in Helen's presence he had felt distinctly ill at ease ever since.

That afternoon Fritz had the leg up on two winners, neither of which was a favorite in the betting. He and Jim Burrell were eating supper when Burrell broached a subject of much interest to himself.

"Did you get any side money to-day, Fritz?" he inquired innocently.

"Not a cent," the boy answered.
"Why?"

The valet's brows were knotted in a scowl.

"The dirty pikers!" he growled. "The guys that own them horses collared Pop Larue as soon as the book was out to get you to ride their skates, and I happen to know that they cleaned up with both of 'em. The least they oughta done was to slip you a hundred or two."

"But I didn't expect anything," replied Fritz frankly.

"I know you didn't, Fritzie—I know. But it's comin' to you, just the same. Of course, if you hadn't won, I wouldn't 'a' mentioned it; but you did win, and you oughta get your bit. The trouble with you, my boy, is that you're a rube, and they know it, and hand it to you. What's the use of us puttin' over these winners at fancy prices for a lot o' cheap stiffs? What do we get out of it, I'd like to know? Here you go to work to-day, and earn fifty dollars in ridin' fees; and do you get a bean out of it? Not on your life! It all goes to Dutch Engel. When he had you, he beat you up; and now you're makin' the coin, it all goes to him. You certainly are a good thing for the Dutchman. Pretty soft for him! He'll collect every cent you make until you're twenty-one, and here we are going around without a nickel—bar what Mr. Larue gives us."

"That's so," responded Fritz thoughtfully.

It did not even occur to him to note the artful use of the plural pronoun as Burrell descended on their mutual grievances. Never having had any use for money since Larue had taken him, it had never occurred to him that he was being ill-used by the owners of winning horses he had ridden. Still, now that the matter had been explained to him so comprehensively, he could readily see what an injustice was being done him, and a bitter rage began slowly to swell within him as he reflected on the financial benefit which was accruing to his foster father.

"Of course," continued Burrell, "I'm not kickin' on my own account, but I could make more money—lots more—valetin' boys with half your reputation. Mr. Larue pays me to tote your tack around, and all that, and while the old boy's all right, Fritz, *he leaves all th' big work to me*. While he's gone, I'm goin' to make all your engagements—and, on the square, I oughta have more money. Here I'll have to rush around all mornin' fixin' things up for you and gettin' you good mounts, and then I'll be locked up in the jockey room all afternoon the same as you are. And what'll I get? I'll be in exactly the same boat that you're in, Fritzie, my boy. We'll both be workin' for that Dutch devil that took you out of the orphan asylum for what he could make out o' you."

"Well," replied Fritz to this tirade, a little sorry both for himself and his valet, "I don't see how we're goin' to help it if the owners don't feel like doing the right thing when I win. Several of the kids have asked me if I make anything on the side. They all do, but I can't seem to make any."

"Well, you could, Fritz, if you'd show 'em you ain't a hayseed. You might kinder tell some o' these tightwads that if they expect you to do your best there ought to be somethin' in it for us. What's the matter with me, when I'm makin' up your engagements, explainin' just how it is—you workin' for Engel, an' never havin' a nickel for yourself,

and you backin' me up with a little talk? Then watch 'em come across. Why, you oughta be makin' a hundred dollars a day right along."

"Why, I wouldn't know what to do with so much money!" said Fritz, surprised.

"I'd show you. It'd come in handy, all right. And, say"—here Burrell leaned forward confidentially—"horse owners ain't the only people in the world that's got money. If they won't come through, maybe somebody else will."

Fritz munched stolidly away at his beefsteak and potatoes, and said nothing. He had not grasped the idea suggested by his valet. Nevertheless, it was quite evident to the designing Burrell that the race rider was doing some weighty thinking.

Shrewdly judging that the surest way to clinch any lingering compunctions which the boy might entertain regarding the proposed program, Burrell continued throughout the balance of the meal to play with consummate art upon the one string that he hoped would in time bring forth the music so dear to the valet's soul—the music of clinking gold. But still he was shrewd enough not to overdo the matter, and as they left the Irish Kitchen he switched to another topic.

CHAPTER X.

On Thursday morning one of Steve Holland's grooms stopped at Larue's barn on his return from breakfast at the boarding house outside the track.

"Say, Jim," said he to Burrell, "Mr. Holland wants you to stop in at the barn when you get a chance. He said he'd like to look over Fritz's book. Wants him to ride a horse for him tomorrow if he ain't engaged."

When Burrell had finished shining Fritz's riding boots he wandered carelessly in the direction of Holland's quarters. But he did not stop at the barn. Instead, he kept on to the rail which surmounted the far turn of the track. He seated himself thereon, and in a few minutes was joined by Steve Hol-

land. The latter came to the point at once:

"Engel's got a hundred dollars Moran turned back to him when he gave up the ring?"

"Yes."

"Borrow fifty of it from him, and get him to go over to the city with you to-night. Give him a good time, but be in Luigi's Restaurant with him at exactly eleven-thirty. Luigi knows you?"

"Yes."

"He'll take you to a table that'll be reserved for you. A baby-faced blonde that you'll probably recognize—I know you've seen her two or three times at the track—will make a play for Fritz. Boost it along. There's a bunch of money in it if he falls hard enough."

"How big a bunch?" growled the crafty valet, his narrow eyes peering cunningly over his fat jowls. He knew he was dealing with a crook as shifty as himself. The two would remind one strongly of dogs about to quarrel over a bone.

"You never had any kick comin' about how we treated you, did you?" demanded Holland. "If it comes down to cases, you ought to play the game for nothing, so far's we're concerned, for as soon as the kid begins earning money there'll be a big cut in it for you."

"Nuttin' stirrin'," Burrell retorted coolly. "Name the figger."

"One-fifty per for each of the first four jobs. After that you look out for yourself."

"Oh, I'll look out for myself, all right. Don't you worry none about me." He laid an unnecessary and aggravating emphasis on the pronouns.

"Don't you get gay," Holland warned him, with equal emphasis on the personal pronoun, "or I'll look after myself. It wouldn't take much to hang your skin on the outside fence."

"Yours, neither," retorted Burrell.

"Well, we won't quarrel about it." Holland's tone was conciliatory now. "We understand each other, and the coin's ready whenever you kick in with your end of the job."

That evening when Fritz and his valet had left the track inclosure and were walking slowly toward the Irish Kitchen, Burrell suddenly paused.

"Say, Fritzie!"

"Say it yourself."

"I'm gettin' good and sick o' the Irish Kitchen. What's the matter with a change?"

"I'm willing. Where'll we go?"

"Oh, any old place so long as the food ain't greasy. I'm sick o' beef-steak an' fried spuds. We've got money. How about goin' across to San Francisco an' buyin' a bang-up dinner at the St. Francis? We can take in a show afterward, eh?"

With the consciousness of a hundred dollars gold in his pocket, and impelled by the Irish generosity of him, Fritz fell readily into the trap.

"All right," he replied largely. "I'll treat."

"No, I will," protested Burrell. "Lend me fifty of that hundred until Pop Larue gets back, and I'll do the honors. I'll pay you back out o' my wages, or the first piece o' coin we butt into."

Flattered with his own importance in thus being asked such a favor by a grown man, Fritz instantly complied with his valet's request. Jim Burrell was profuse in his thanks.

"Let's cut loose to-night, kid," he suggested. "I feel like doin' a quarter in twenty-three."

It developed that Fritz felt likewise. He was feeling lonely for the Larues, and a very boyish inclination to see something of life had suddenly taken possession of him. At Fritz's age such desires are very natural, and a hundred dollars easy money is the very best incentive.

"Will we take in a show?" Fritz inquired eagerly, as he and his valet went aboard the ferryboat. "I was never to a real show in my life. Mother Engel took me to a nickelodeon a few times."

"You bet we will," replied Burrell heartily. "We'll take in a vaudeville show after dinner, and after that we'll go down to Luigi's, on the Barbary Coast, and see a bit of high life."

"What kind of a place is Luigi's?"

"It's a bully good joint, where they serve dago dinners, and there's always a bunch of live ones there. Some people say it's tough, but the best folks in town go there, and some of them bring their wives. There's music and dancing. We'll have something to eat there, and look at the animals two by two."

"I'm glad it's all right," replied Fritz, much relieved. "Mr. Larue told me to be very careful where I went, even with you."

"He told me the same thing, Fritzie. He knows I wouldn't take you to any joint that wasn't respectable. Luigi's is O. K. Don't worry. I'll treat you like you was my own son."

Arrived in the city half an hour later, Fritz and the valet proceeded uptown to the St. Francis grill, where Burrell ordered a dinner that indicated an epicurean taste long held in restraint. He even ordered a quart of champagne, and in order to prove his right to the society of men of the world Fritz was easily persuaded to take one glass, upon the solemn assurance of Burrell that it was "good for him" and "wouldn't hurt him." Fritz drank it, therefore, and was secretly pleased to discover that Burrell was right. It hadn't hurt him, and, in fact, if anything, it really did him good, for, owing to some reason that was not quite apparent, Fritz had never felt quite so happy and good-natured in all his life.

After dinner they went to a vaudeville show, where the antics of a comedy acrobat so tickled Fritz that he laughed until he cried, and his sides ached. For a week past he had been gloomy and unhappy, but to-night his grumps had been swept away in a wave of perfectly unreasonable and delirious delight.

When he and Burrell left the theater, about eleven o'clock, the boy was still thrilling with the fierce joy of his first taste of liberty, and in the contemplation of the further pleasures to be encountered at Luigi's, the Larue family seemed very far from him indeed.

Luigi's was the most popular of the cheap, garish, dollar table d'hôte Italian

restaurants, and was conspicuous for its ultrabohemianism.

The restaurant was located in the basement of an office building given over to shyster lawyers, psuedo booking agents, quacks, and other social parasites. A broad flight of marble steps, with imitation palms flanking the banisters, led down to the café.

As Fritz and Burrell descended these stairs, a blare of raucous sounds, combining the clatter of glasses, the scraping of feet, the notes of an orchestra playing ragtime, drifted up to them, mingled with that peculiarly loud, blatant brand of feminine laughter which Goldsmith tells us bespeaks the vacant mind.

Burrell and his charge pressed through the swinging doors, and passed into a great low-ceilinged room. Around the four walls dozens of small tables were arranged, at which men and women were dining or drinking. Perspiring Italian waiters dodged nimbly through the crowd, shouting "Gangway!" and balancing aloft great trays of refreshment.

In the center of the café a small expanse of waxed maple flooring indicated the area set aside for those sons and daughters of Terpsichore who desired to "rag it."

Just now no one was "ragging it," but strutting about in the center of the dancing space, his head thrown back, his eyes half closed, a dissipated, pasty-looking young man of undoubted Latin antecedents was singing the prologue to "Pagliacci." He was oblivious to all that went on around him—and well he might be. For he could sing. The sweet, true notes of a once magnificent lyric baritone were still well worth listening to. Luigi, most genial of bonifaces, knew that. Ergo, he paid the singer five dollars a night, for it added "tone" to his place, and the "swells" came down for the sake of "art" and "life," and threw much silver at the sad-eyed singer.

Burrell had mentioned to Fritz that Luigi was a friend of his, and scarcely had the two passed inside the door before the proprietor saw them. He

smiled, and held aloft two fingers questioningly. Burrell nodded, and they crossed the floor to the table to which Luigi led them. He shook hands with the Italian, and introduced Fritz.

Signor Luigi was felicitated to meet Mr. Engel, and when informed by Burrell just who his friend Mr. Engel was, the boniface insisted upon ordering a round of drinks on the house. He sat with them for a few minutes, and talked generalities; but left them presently to greet other diners.

Jim Burrell glanced searchingly about for the "baby-faced blonde." Almost instantly his glance met that of a girl who sat at a table just beyond, and facing Burrell. She was a small, blond, exquisite little person—the kind of blonde who prefers black eyebrows and black eyelashes. She smiled incessantly in the knowledge that her teeth added to the beauty of a petulant little mouth. There was a baby stare in her large blue eyes. While obviously she was not a habitué of the night life of the city, there was that about her which proclaimed a patent contradiction.

As she rose from her chair to join in a dance with her male companion, Burrell recognized Robert Kellar—not that he knew the merchant by name, but as a track follower he was quick to recognize the face of a not infrequent visitor. Also, the incongruity of the girl's appearance was explained. Her profile showed sharply the lines of maturity, and while to the casual observer the fact that she wore her hair done low on her neck might have been convincing proof that she was of tender years, Jim Burrell was too old a rounder to be caught with such pretense. Instantly he tabulated her as "no chicken."

As the flushed and tired dancers began to return to their tables, and it was evident that the music would shortly cease, the girl and her companion so timed their movements that when the dance finally came to an end they found themselves standing alongside the table at which Fritz and Burrell sat.

The couple seemed about to return to their own table, when the girl suddenly glanced sharply at Burrell, as if

striving to remember where she had met him. As her companion made as if to lead her away she showed her even white teeth in a frank smile, and held out her hand to the valet.

"This is Mr. Burrell, I'm sure," she said, dimpling.

Jim Burrell stood up, and bowed stiffly, like a pair of scissors closing. "I'm the party, all right, all right," he said, with a clumsy air of gallantry; "but I don't quite get you." He was striving desperately to appear elegant. "Your face seems awfully familiar to me, but—"

"I don't believe you have the slightest recollection of me. I was introduced to you at the race track last season, and you gave me a tip on the winner of the Burne Handicap."

There was no doubt about the identity of the girl now. Burrell hastened to take his cue:

"Oh, sure! Of course I know you. You're Miss Smith's friend, ain't you? Howdy do?"

The girl laughed, and turned to her companion. "He's forgotten already!" She shook her little forefinger at Burrell. "Naughty! Naughty! You've forgotten my name. I'm Miss Barton—Hazel Barton. Now do you remember me?"

"Well, I should say I do!" replied the valet, and shook hands heartily. "Shake hands with my friend, Mr. Fritz Engel. Mr. Engel is the ridin' kid. He's the boy that's been bootin' 'em home in front two an' three a day for the past month at San Pablo."

Miss Barton nodded in the most friendly and adorable manner possible as Fritz arose to acknowledge the introduction.

"Oh, I recognized him," cried the little siren. "Whenever I go to the track I bet on him. I'd know that red head in a fog."

She pointed her index finger at him and wiggled her thumb, in the pantomime of bohemia holding up a victim. "Oh, you hand-riding kiddo!" she gurgled. "I've got you—I've got you. Give me a tip on the races, or I'll shoot!"

It was all very pretty and feminine,

and adorably ridiculous from Fritz's point of view. He fell—a very willing victim.

"Do you dance, Mr. Engel?" the little Circe inquired.

Fritz shook his head. He was too embarrassed for speech.

As the girl showed no inclination to return to her table with her companion, Burrell, in a belated attempt to be polite, injected himself into the conversation.

"Won't you and your gentleman friend sit down an' have somethin'?" he suggested hospitably.

Kellar raised a deprecating hand. "Thank you," he murmured coldly. "There's hardly room for four at your table."

Hastily he turned to resume his own chair, his brows contracted in a frown. He was truly irritated, for it had been no part of his program that he should be introduced to Burrell; and as he passed the girl he nudged her and shook his head. "You sit there and talk with your friends a few minutes if you wish," he said.

The waiter was already at hand with a chair, and the girl sat down between Burrell and the jockey. Half shielding her pretty mouth with her large pink hand bag, she leaned forward, and whispered to them confidentially:

"Cousin Bob's an old grump. He didn't want to come here, in the first place. He says it's too rough for me, but I don't care. I like it once in a while, just for a change, you know."

She turned to Fritz Engel. "You don't think I oughtn't come here, do you, Mr. Engel?"

Fritz was about to compliment her on her excellent choice of restaurants when Burrell interrupted:

"Aw, cut out that 'mister' talk when you speak to Fritz. He don't know what the word means. Call him Fritz."

"Answer my question, Fritz," the girl demanded, tempering her audacity with a smile that to the heart-hungry boy seemed to establish at once a bond between them. Secretly he was grateful to her for the familiarity, for it put him at his ease immediately.

"It's all right, Miss Barton—I like it," he confided.

"You shall dance with me for that. It'll make Cousin Bob angry, but I don't care. Come, Fritz! You don't have to know how to dance to get around on this floor. You just have to walk and swing your shoulders. I'll show you." And before Fritz quite realized what he was doing he was pirouetting around in the whirr of dancers. The girl guided him cleverly, the while she endeavored to explain to him the mysteries of the Barbary Coast "rag." A dainty odor of perfume was wafted from her as she danced; her breath, sweet as a baby's, fanned his beardless cheek. Once she squeezed his hand, and laughed in frank acknowledgment of her flirtatious behavior. It was all very new and strange to Fritz, of course; hence he enjoyed it immensely. Presently he found himself talking quite freely, and promising to give Hazel—she insisted that he call her by her first name—a tip on the races.

They returned to the table.

"Well," demanded Burrell, "d'ye think he'll ever dance as well as he rides?"

"I'm sure of that, but I'd be afraid to dance with him very often. He's so bold! He squeezed my hand."

And such are the mental processes of infatuated youth that Fritz really believed that he had done so! He blushed, and dropped his glance modestly; then boldly he made quick appraisal of her many charms. She was extremely beautiful, thought Fritz, and her lips were very red. Helen Larue's lips were red, too, but they were pale in comparison with Miss Barton's. Fritz guessed she was younger than Helen—about his own age. She wore a number of rings on her dimpled little fingers, and a diamond flashed in the lobe of each pink ear. Her voice was soft, drawling, a throaty baritone peculiarly musical; and, best of all, she seemed unreservedly happy to meet Fritz Engel. Curiosity and admiration mingled in her glances when she looked at him.

Suddenly he ceased from his inspection of the girl with a shamed impres-

sion that he had been staring at her with his mouth wide open. In the midst of one of her pretty complimentary speeches she had suddenly paused ever so slightly, and dropped her eyelids, as if embarrassed. Instantly Fritz took the cue, and abandoned his stare.

Presently Miss Barton looked up at him very shyly from under her long black lashes. It is an old trick—a trick with which young women with black eyelashes have lured the male of the species since time began. Kellar, who had been watching this little byplay, knew that his well-planned shot had landed with devastating effect. Nothing now remained for him but gather up the pieces. He approached the table where Hazel sat, and, measuring her companions scornfully, asked:

"Don't you think we'd better go now?"

"Oh, let's stay a little while longer. Don't be so mean, Cousin Bob," the girl pouted. "I've simply been dying to meet Mr. Engel, and you want to drag me away just as though you were jealous."

"Oh, I'm not jealous of anybody, Hazel; but I'm tired, and I want to go home. I didn't care to come here, in the first place. I knew how it would be. You never want to go home."

"Why should I when I'm in good company?" she bantered.

"If I was sure of that I'd leave you here, for I've got to get up early tomorrow' morning."

The girl nudged Fritz under the table. Her eyes telegraphed the message: "Help me out." She turned again to Kellar. "This gentleman is Mr. Fritz Engel, the great jockey from the San Pablo track. I'm sure you can trust me with him."

"Come!" said Kellar roughly. "I've got to go, and I object to leaving you here."

"Well, go, then!" she answered him sharply. "I'm going to stay."

"Of course, I can't make you come." Kellar's manner was cold and haughty. "But this is the last time I'll take you out. I hate these places. I never want to come to them." He seized his hat and overcoat, and started out of the

café; but, evidently reconsidering his action, he returned.

"Will you promise me, Mr. Engel, to see that she gets home safely—and soon?" he added.

"Certainly," replied Fritz.

The girl beamed her thanks, and as Kellar took his departure without the formality of saying good night, she turned to the waiter, and ordered him to have a taxi at the door at twelve-thirty. Apparently the defection of her escort troubled her but little. The conversation was resumed, and turned entirely upon racing. As the boy unfolded some commonplace incident or anecdote of the paddock or track, she listened with exaggerated interest, laughing at just the proper moment, and marveling much at his courage and skill.

"It's wonderful. I think it's simply wonderful," she repeated over and over, and ere long a hazy impression began to gather in the boy's brain that perhaps, after all, it *was* wonderful. To the master in any vocation in life, praise is always sweet—one of the inevitable fruits of victory. It did not occur to Fritz that Miss Barton's praise was a trifle too exuberant, considering their short acquaintance and her limited knowledge of the race track.

At twelve-twenty the waiter announced the taxi in waiting. Burrell helped Hazel into her furs, while Fritz proudly escorted her across the floor and out to the waiting car. He helped her in, and quickly followed. Burrell came to the window of the taxi, and made his clumsy adieu.

"Meet you at the one-fifteen boat, Fritz," he said. "Good night, Miss Barton."

The chauffeur threw in the clutch, and the car started forward with a violent lurch. The girl uttered a little feminine cry of alarm, and, in seeming fright, grasped Fritz by the hand. Her own small, warm hand was ungloved, and at the touch Fritz thrilled. He did not offer to withdraw his hand, and neither did the girl. On the contrary, she continued to hold his fingers in hers as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Secretly the woman loathed the task which Kellar had assigned to her, for in spite of the rouge, the vacuous laugh, and the bold, flashing stare of her big blue eyes, she was not entirely heartless. As Kellar had often remarked himself, she was not half so bad as she was painted. She was in love with Kellar, and might some day become his wife; and when he asked her to perform for him the trifling service of ensnaring this boy she had promised willingly. With all the daring of her nature, she had looked forward to a certain sportsmanlike enjoyment in bewitching a worldly-wise, precocious youth. Instead, she had been forced to ply her arts on a lad too much of a baby to understand them, and a certain disgust came over her.

Fifteen minutes later they stood in the dim and deserted reception hall of the apartment hotel in which Hazel Barton resided.

"Fritzie, you're the dearest boy I've ever met," she whispered. "Will you come over to-morrow night and take me to dinner and the show?"

In an ecstasy of happiness, the boy promised. He was overwhelmed, dazzled at the events of the night.

To the clever and worldly-wise adventuress, masquerading as an insouciant lass of eighteen, there came now something more than an inkling of the boy's innocence. Mingled with the thought that in accomplishing her part she was pleasing Kellar there was also the knowledge that neither she nor any of her ilk could ever quite destroy that sense of decency and woman worship in the boy. After all, she reflected, while it was an unpleasant job, it might be well to have him bitterly disillusioned early in life. It might save him for something better in the years to come.

She kissed him—suddenly, tenderly, a little pityingly.

"You dear, decent little lad!" she murmured. . "Good night." He stretched forth a detaining hand, and something wet and warm dropped on it. It was a tear.

At the one-fifteen boat Burrell awaited him, and in the jockey's shining eyes

and heightened color the valet read the news. He was too old and sordid to think much about the matter, however. Besides, he was eager to get home and into bed; so he asked no questions, and Fritz, enthralled with the memories of the night, was content to dream uninterrupted of the vistas of happiness so suddenly opened before him. He was too obsessed with the new developments in his life to notice that Jim Burrell kept shooting suspicious glances at a young man seated by himself across the saloon deck. He had seen this same young man at Luigi's with a slumming party, and had been vaguely uncomfortable because of the apparent interest he had manifested in Fritz.

"I wish to the devil he hadn't seen me out with the boy," was Burrell's thought. "I'll take care to keep out of his way. It may be that he didn't know me, but there's no doubt he recognized the kid."

The young man in question was Judge Moncure.

CHAPTER XI.

During the week that followed Fritz's introduction to Hazel Barton, the jockey luxuriated in his new world. The evening after their excursion to the coast, Fritz suggested to his valet that they again cross to San Francisco for dinner, but Burrell pleaded weariness after the dissipation of the night before, although he urged Fritz to go. This opportunity for an uninterrupted prowl in his fool's paradise was exactly what Fritz was looking for, so, simulating some slight regret that Burrell did not feel fresh enough to accompany him, the boy declared that he thought he would go alone.

He went, Burrell smiling broadly at him as he trudged for the train. Arrived at the ferry depot, Fritz telephoned Hazel that he was on his way up. She instructed the infatuated boy to hurry, and in order to accelerate his appearance—although, in reality, to deplete his supply of ready cash—she insisted that he take a taxi.

Upon arrival at Hazel's apartments,

he was admitted by a Japanese maid, who informed him that her mistress would be ready in a moment. Presently the petite little adventuress entered the room. She came straight to the boy, greeting him impulsively and affectionately. For the moment her pretty doll's face was dimpled in her peculiarly winning smile; then suddenly, like a cloud darkening the surface of a mountain lake, her features contracted in a frown.

"I'm in a dreadful peck of trouble, Fritz," she began.

"What's the matter, Hazel," Fritz demanded, much concerned, and instantly alert to discover what danger or annoyance threatened this charming girl.

"My allowance from the estate left me by my father was due three days ago, and it hasn't arrived. I haven't the slightest idea what can possibly be the matter. I've wired twice, and received no answer. Still, that wouldn't worry me if I hadn't been such a little fool as to quarrel with my cousin last night. Were it not for that, I could ring him up, and borrow some money until mine arrives. As it is now"—here the siren's lower lip trembled, and she seemed about to weep—"my bills for the first of the month aren't paid, and some of the horrid creatures are beginning to annoy me terribly, and I haven't any money to give them."

Fritz considered this dreadful state of affairs for quite half a minute before the bright idea struck him. Hazel saw the dawn of a suggestion gathering in the boy's eager eyes. Remembering his experience with Helen Larue and the ring, however, he was fearful of insulting his charmer. Hazel saw his hesitancy, and clinched the matter by commencing to cry.

"I know it ain't just the thing to say to a lady," Fritz began, much embarrassed, "but how much money do you need?"

"Two hundred and eighty dollars," sobbed Hazel.

Fritz was chapfallen. "I was going to ask you to let me loan you some money, but I haven't that much, and I don't know exactly how to get it. I

could let you have twenty-five to-night, and perhaps—"

"Oh, thank you so much, Fritzie!" cried the siren gratefully. "That will help out for a day or two until I can hear from the East."

Without further ado, Fritz placed twenty-five dollars in her willing palm. A peck of a kiss and a tiny hug was his reward.

"I have six mounts to-morrow," he continued. "You know, Hazel, the Dutchman that adopted me gets all my riding fees, and the only money I have is what the boss gives me. Once in a while I pick up some side money from an owner when I win a race. Perhaps to-morrow, if I have any luck, I may be able to get you the balance of what money you need."

"You're a dear!" declared Miss Barton emphatically. "But do try to get it for me, won't you?"

All trace of her recent woe vanished instantly, and together they descended to the waiting taxi—not, however, until Hazel had phoned for seats at the most expensive theater in town.

They dined in a little private room at an uptown restaurant, and, under the clever management of Fritz's female mentor, he tipped a waiter for the first time in his young life, and tipped him generously. The magnitude of the check rather disturbed him for the moment, but he had a horror of appearing cheap in the presence of this lovely girl, and paid the score with fine nonchalance.

The show afterward, which they saw from a box, was destined to fill in the happiest three hours of Fritz Engel's existence, despite the fact that in after years he never failed to think of it without mingled feelings of shame and disgust.

After the performance, Hazel suggested a light midnight supper; but, with the knowledge that his funds were at too low an ebb to permit of further expenditure, and ashamed to admit it, Fritz pleaded weariness after two successive nights of whirlwind enjoyment, and suggested that he take her home. The woman, divining his secret, readily consented—humoring him, praising his

riding, flattering him in every possible way.

At parting she pleaded with him to be very careful at all times—for her sake—and when he would have lingered over his farewell she dismissed him quickly but kindly by reminding him that he needed lots of sleep in order to be bright and fresh for his efforts next day.

As he came into the tack room the following morning, after putting the horses through their exercise, he found Jim Burrell seated on his bed, smoking. Now, on his way home the night previous, and during the morning, Fritz had been doing some tall thinking. The necessity of saving Hazel from the ignominy of being harassed by her creditors had been uppermost in his mind, which very naturally caused him to hark back to his valet's remarks in the Irish Kitchen three nights previous. Burrell had told him then that he ought to be making at least a hundred dollars a day extra money, and Burrell had been long enough in the game to know what he was talking about. He resolved to feel his valet out further on the subject.

"Well, old man," he began briskly, "what d'you suppose the chances are for a little side money? Think the owners of any of the mounts I've got to-day will do anything?"

"Search me," replied Burrell sententiously; "I wouldn't bank on it."

Fritz felt a sudden unreasoning tide of anger.

"The dirty misers!" he growled.

"Surest thing you know," the valet replied sympathetically. "But you can't expect to make any money unless you win, and how d'you know you're goin' to win? Gettin' a little swelled, ain't you?"

The satire was not lost on Fritz. He sat for a few minutes thinking profoundly. True, he had been a remarkably successful jockey; so successful, in fact, that the thought of not winning at least one race of an afternoon had not occurred to him. And that particular race might be for the very man who would not make him a present. From the very element of doubt involved in the issue before him his ideas now

switched from the possibility of victory to the probability of defeat. With the uncanny certitude of a mind reader, the valet sensed the jockey's line of reasoning. He clasped his knee, leaned back, and blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling.

"Of course," he remarked presently, "it's all in knowin' how. *I used to be valet for a rider that knew when he was goin' to lose!*"

Burrell chuckled, as at the remembrance of an ancient joke.

Fritz had been too long around the track and paddock to misunderstand the valet's suggestion. It shocked him, but not nearly so forcibly as it would have a week previous.

"If Pop Larue should hear you talk that way, he'd fix you," he cautioned Burrell. Nevertheless, he continued to eye the fellow half curiously, half expectantly. In his secret soul, he was eager for some definite information from the valet which might tend to lead him out of his financial difficulties, even though he felt certain that the advice could not be followed with honor, and that when given he would decline it. Such, however, is the psychology of adolescence. Fritz was still a child. He wanted to play with fire.

"Aw, Pop Larue's an old fool!" muttered Burrell, in tones of deep disgust. "Best old scout on earth, but a boob. He don't make a bean outer the racin' game. Unless he's got a gold mine, he'll go broke in the next five years. I tell you, Fritz, if a man wants to get money on a race track, he's got to gamble for it, and it's good gambling when he's got an ace in the hole. I know a guy that'll pay for the ace."

"Who's that?" demanded Fritz.

"Never mind who it is. How much money do you need?"

"Three hundred dollars."

"Well, mebbe I can get it for you. Let's see. You're ridin' Moonstone again this afternoon, an' he'll be favorite. This friend o' mine will easy put up three hundred dollars—yes, five hundred—if he can bet on the second choice, with Moonstone in the can."

"I wouldn't do it," cried Fritz resentfully. "I wouldn't do it."

"Well, I didn't ask you to do it, did I?" growled Burrell. "You said you needed three hundred bucks, an' I was just tellin' you how you could get it."

"I wouldn't do it," Fritz insisted, and from his very vehemence Burrell guessed that, despite his declaration, he might do it, providing his supposed necessity pinched him sufficiently hard. Paying no attention to Fritz's refusal, he continued:

"It's cash in advance—money in th' mitt—an' that's a good thing to know --any time you're broke."

Then, judging that it would be unwise to press the matter further, and that the germ of dishonesty would sprout all the quicker if allowed to sink in, Burrell betook his scheming person out of the tack room.

Coming events are said to cast their shadows before, and Fritz's experience that afternoon tended to prove it. In his conversation with Burrell, he had pondered the probability of not riding at least one winning race each day. With six mounts, which number he had had daily since his famous effort on Moonstone in the Christmas Handicap, it did not seem possible that he should not win at all. Yet that was precisely what happened.

He did not realize that his little excursions of the two previous nights had left his nerves just a little bit raw, and his quickness of sight and perception a mite impaired, but it is a fact that he got away from the post poorly all day. Moreover, he lacked the patience to coddle the fractious Moonstone. He struck the horse with his spur, and Moonstone sulked.

Realizing his mistake, Fritz exerted all his skill to bring the horse down the stretch in front, but in vain. Moonstone was a notorious "in-and-outter," and there was no criticism of the jockey's ride, for every one understood—or thought he did. The net result of that afternoon's labors was a second and a third, but no brackets.

Fritz and Burrell took the six-o'clock boat to the city that evening. Neither

had suggested it, yet each seemed to feel that it was tacitly understood. Despite the knowledge that his record of landing at least one winner a day had been shattered, Fritz was in good spirits. After the temptation of the morning, he had plumed himself on his firmness. Nevertheless, the prospect of facing Hazel without the funds she needed so badly was not a pleasant one.

Burrell also was in great good humor; his sodden red face was alight with something of the glow of his own golden prospects. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind now regarding the future. He had his ace in the hole, and knew it.

As the ferryboat plowed along toward the pier, Fritz turned to the valet.

"Got any of that fifty left?" he asked. "I'm busted—almost."

"Sure!" Burrell handed out a gold piece. "You wouldn't need that ten, kid, if you'd taken my tip this morning. You'd have made five hundred without even havin' to work for it. Moonstone quit on you, anyhow, an' you might just as well 'a' had the dough."

"That's so," Fritz responded gloomily. He was not so proud now of the firmness he had displayed.

"I'm goin' to see this moneyed friend o' mine to-night," the valet continued, "so I'll leave you for a while. I'll be at Luigi's at nine o'clock, and if you want to see me you can come down there, or telephone. And I want you to remember, so long as you're broke, that this pal o' mine'll loan you five hundred any old time; then some day I'll pass you th' word to rear back on somethin' you're ridin', an' when you do you'll be even with him. It's good hard cash, Fritz, my son, and if you want it you can have it any old time after nine o'clock to-night."

Fritz made no reply, and at the ferry depot they separated, Burrell to meet his moneyed friend, and Fritz to call on Hazel Barton. At the corner of Market and East Streets, Burrell waited until he saw Fritz go by on the car; whereupon he hurried back to the telephone station in the ferry building, and called up Hazel Barton. Through the cour-

tesy of the thoughtful Mr. Holland, the valet had been supplied with her telephone number for just such an emergency as the present.

"Fritz is on his way up—busted. He's ripe. The minute he steps in, strike him—an' strike him hard! Understand? Wolf him."

As a result of this message the stage was set for Fritz upon his arrival. For nearly ten minutes he stood in the hall ringing the bell to Hazel Barton's flat, and just as he was despairing of receiving an answer the door opened slowly about six inches, and Hazel's eyes peered through the aperture.

"Oh, Fritz, is it you?" she cried, much relieved. "I was afraid to open the door. Come in. I thought it was one of those horrid collectors. He's been dogging me all day, and I told him to call this evening, and I'd leave the money in the office for him. I'm so glad to see you, Fritzie, dear. You brought the money, of course?"

Fritz was so distressed at the condition of affairs in which he found both Hazel and himself that, his habitual calm deserting him, he blurted out:

"Why, no. I—I—well, I didn't win a single race-to-day."

Hazel turned sadly away from him, sat down on the hall seat, and commenced to sob softly.

"Oh, Fritzie," she wailed, "you promised you'd bring it, and I depended upon you. What shall I do—what shall I do? That man will be here——"

The sight of her assumed anguish swept away the last bulwark of resistance from the mind of the impressionable boy. That she should suffer so while it lay within his power to prevent it, at any price, was intolerable.

"Don't worry, Hazel," he said, placing his arm around her. "I didn't know it was as bad as that. If that man comes tell him to wait until nine-thirty. I'll be back with the money about then."

He kissed her, and departed for the nearest public telephone, and called Burrell up at Luigi's.

"This is Fritz," he began hesitatingly. "Seen that friend of yours yet?"

"Sure! It's all O. K., just as I told you. How much do you want?"

"Better make it five hundred. How soon can I have it?"

"At ten minutes after nine. Meet me at Lotta's Fountain then, an' I'll slip you the roll."

"I'll be there," replied Fritz, and hung up.

He kept his tryst. At nine-thirty he was back at Hazel's flat with five hundred dollars in his pocket.

"Here you are, Hazel," he announced, stacking up fifteen double eagles on the table before her. "There's three hundred for you."

Hazel's evident relief was ample reward, and his bond with the unknown gambler troubled him but little. After all, there had never been any vital reason why he should have been honest. It was a virtue that had never been strongly impressed upon him. The Laruës had found him so, and had taken it for granted that he would remain so, provided they kept him clear of disreputable associates. Now that he found himself in an atmosphere of dishonesty, he responded readily to the suggestions of his environment. His natural impulses were honest, but from his unknown mother he had inherited a disposition to dare all for a loved one. Hence, weighted with this heritage of frailty, he recked not now of his honor. His only thought was for this childlike girl who told him that she loved him.

He had fallen completely under the spell of Hazel Barton. He was plastic in her experienced hands, and at no time was the fullness of her consummate art called into requisition to hold him in line. Realizing this, and following out Kellar's orders to keep the jockey "broke," she practiced upon him the baldest deceits. She kept him dangling.

Before the first week had gone by—from broad hints for furs, a new dress, a diamond ring, and innumerable other articles of female finery, she drifted to open demands. Loving and tender almost to the point of passion, when he gratified her extravagant whims, she was equally prone to pout and sulk like

a spoiled child when he failed to meet her slightest wish.

After receiving the three hundred dollars, she had contrived by one subterfuge after another to secure possession of the remaining two hundred. Next she demanded that Fritz visit a tailor, where he was induced to order on credit some two hundred dollars' worth of raiment, which, as Hazel explained to Fritz, was really necessary, in order that he might not look countrified when they were out together. Fritz had a horror of appearing out of harmony with his lavish expenditures.

Burrell's moneyed friend was quick to take advantage of his contract with the jockey. On Saturday night Fritz had promised to deliver on demand, and on Monday he was called upon to make good his word. He was riding Filbert in a mile-and-a-half race, in which Greenwich, his old adversary of the Christmas Handicap, was favorite over him. The handicappers expected Greenwich to win, but all agreed that he would have to stretch his neck to get home before the candidate from Rancho del Paso. But five horses were carded to start, and the race between the remaining three was plainly for third money only.

Now, the maxim of the "sure-thing" gambler is: "Always fix it for the best horse." There are times, of course, when, tempted by long odds, an endeavor is made to "shoo in" some outsider; but such attempts are dangerous. An outsider is essentially an outsider—usually because of some lack. His weak point is liable to crop out even after the way has been smoothed for him. This is how the race-track crook figures it:

"I cannot bet a large amount at a long price without arousing suspicion, but I can put up thousands on a favorite. If I eliminate the contender—the second choice—in a race, I am getting, say, seven to five against the favorite, where if the second choice did not start the favorite would be quoted at no more than one to two. Thus, if I bet five thousand dollars at that figure, and give the rider who pulls the second choice five hundred dollars, I am standing to

win seven thousand dollars, where, under ordinary circumstances, I would only win twenty-five hundred. *In other words, I am getting eight to one against the five hundred dollars I give away.* Also, dollar for dollar, I can take more money from the bookmakers by wagering heavily on a short-priced horse than by indulging in the necessarily comparative piking which must go with long odds. Again, under such conditions there is less difficulty in getting a rider to carry out my wishes, because obviously there is less danger to him of judicial action when his mount is beaten by what is conceded in advance to be the best horse."

As they sat in the jockey room on Monday, Burrell whispered to Fritz:

"Here's where you get even. Don't try to beat Greenwich in the mile and a half. This is the biggest pipe you ever saw, for Filbert couldn't beat him, anyhow. Didn't I tell you it would come easy?"

Fritz nodded surlily. "I'm glad it's easy," he growled, "because it's the last time I'll ever do it." From which it will be seen that the boy's conscience was not entirely dead. Nevertheless, this determination endured no longer than nine o'clock that night.

Burrell, seated at a small table in Luigi's, grinned reflectively when a waiter came to him and told him he was wanted on the phone. As he expected, it was Fritz's voice that came to him over the wire. Even the wording of the lad's query was identical with what Burrell thought it would be.

"Say, old man, think you could get another five hundred to-night?"

"Easiest thing I do," replied the obliging Mr. Burrell. "But, say," he continued, "you're going it kind of strong, ain't you, Fritz? Five hundred a day is playing pretty high for a kid that never had a bean until last week. What're you doing with it—buying race horses?"

"I ain't buying anything," protested Fritz plaintively. "I need it for a friend of mine that's in big trouble, and this is the last she'll—I mean he'll—need."

Burrell roared with laughter. "Go to it, old sport!" he said. "Meet you every night at Lotta's Fountain with five hundred bucks if you say so. Think you c'n manage to worry along on that?"

Fritz made no reply. Burrell expected none, so, after waiting with the receiver to his ear for half a minute, he hung up.

"On the toboggan for fair," he exulted. "Now I guess I'll collect my bit."

CHAPTER XII.

At the end of ten days' unfettered rambling in his forbidden pastures, Fritz received word one morning that the bulletin board under the grand stand announced a telegram for him at the Western Union office. Burrell went after it immediately. Upon his return, he watched Fritz read the message, and noted the look of annoyance that gathered in the boy's eyes.

"Well, I guess it's all off now," he grumbled, turning to the valet. "Got a wire here from Pop Larue. Mrs. Larue and Helen will be back to-morrow, and I'm to meet them at the train."

"Then the boss ain't comin' with them?" commented Burrell, vastly relieved.

"Nope. He'll have to stay at the ranch a few days longer."

"Well, what're you crabbin' about, then?" demanded Burrell. "We're on velvet till he comes back, anyhow. There's a bunch of mazuma to be picked up in a few days."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking so much about the money," replied Fritz truthfully enough; "it's having to stick in the house every night. If I tell them I'm going out, they'll want to know where I'm going, and what they don't know won't hurt them. You know how it is with women," he added, with a conscious touch of worldly wisdom and masculine contempt.

"You can fix that easily enough," the valet advised. "Tell 'em that now you're in charge o' the string you'll feel easier sleepin' out at the track. Tell 'em you worry a lot if things don't go right, and

you want to be there to see that they do. Give 'em the bunk about havin' to be out early, you know. Then, instead o' worryin' about you, they'll be writin' Pop Larue, tellin' him what a faithful Fido you're gettin' to be."

Fritz grinned at the crafty valet. "You'll do, I guess, old man," he said.

"Oh, don't think I'm strong for all this runnin' around nights," replied Jim Burrell seriously. "I don't know where you go, or what you do, an' I'm always glad to see a young feller enjoy himself in his own way, but lemme tell you somethin': No booze, kid. You can't booze an' do any good next day. You'd better soft pedal on this nighthawkin' for a while, anyhow. It's wearin' on the nerves, an' first thing you know you won't be winnin' as many races as you ought. Better stay in every other night an' get some sleep. You ain't one o' them parlor jockeys that can stay in the hay till ten or eleven o'clock every day. You better stay home to-night an' rest up, for you don't want to go down to the train to-morrer lookin' like a skinned rabbit."

"I've got to go out to-night," Fritz protested. "I'll stay in to-morrow night."

"No, you won't—you'll stay in to-night. I know what's best for you, kid. You just listen to your Uncle Jim—"

"Say," drawled the jockey coldly, "who's boss around here—you or me?"

"I am!" snapped the valet sternly. "I'm boss this much: You stay in to-night, or no more easy money for you. That goes."

"You mind your own business!" cried the boy angrily. "You're only my valet!"

"None o' your young lip to me!" Burrell growled. "You try to sneak over to the city to-night, and I'll swat you one on the ear that'll change your mind. You and me's partners now, an' you got to behave, for my sake as well as yours. If I didn't like you, I'd let you run yourself to death, but you know as well as I do that this knockin' around nights'll put you on the hog. Now, go on an' tend to business. Get wise to yourself!"

The value of Burrell's advice and his determination not to be trifled with were apparent to Fritz, but while he disdained to argue the matter further, secretly he resolved to give the valet the slip that night.

Before the races were over, however, his anger had cooled to such an extent that he telephoned Hazel Barton and informed her that he was too sleepy and tired to come over that night.

As Burrell watched him undress and roll into bed right after supper, he came to the conclusion that the boy's common sense had triumphed, as he expected it would. And while he realized that Fritz was still displeased with him, it did not occur to Burrell to attempt to humor the lad in the least. Until the occasion should arise to make another determined stand in defense of his own financial interests, he would treat the boy as if no differences had arisen between them. His actions for the next few days might be tinged with greater deference and kindness, but never by one word would he sue for a return of the camaraderie which had obtained between them up to the time he had been forced to exert his power over the boy.

The wisdom of this course, from the valet's point of view, was apparent before twenty-four hours had passed. Fritz came to him, a trifle shamefaced, and attempted a bungling apology for his defiant action. Burrell poked a fat thumb in the youngster's short ribs, and cuffed him good-naturedly.

"G'wan!" he growled. "Cut that out! You're all right, old scout. You just need somebody to tell you what's right once in a while."

That night they both went over to the city. Fritz, taking the valet's advice, had insisted to Mrs. Larue and Helen that in the absence of "pop" it would be best for him to continue to sleep at the track. His ruse had succeeded, and until Larue's return he had a clear track for the race with pleasure.

On the way across, Fritz was so silent and preoccupied that Burrell undertook to rally him:

"What's eatin' you to-night, Fritz? Busted again?"

"Oh, I'm always broke," Fritz laughed. "Easy come, easy go," he added, with sporty nonchalance.

Burrell's brow darkened. For several days past he had been growing restive under the insistent demands of his charge. "They've got him now. What do they want to keep trimmin' him for? And where do I come in?" he complained to himself. "It's about time I commenced lookin' out for number one. If Red Steve thinks I'm goin' to lay dead for that six hundred, he's crazy."

For all that he was an arrant rogue, Burrell was not wholly bad. He was fond of Fritz Engel, and wanted to see the boy, as he termed it, "do well," even though in the making he jeopardized his soul and honor. Making money, no matter how devious the method involved, provided he kept well within the penal code, was all in the day's work to Jim Burrell. His twenty years in the slime of the turf had not failed to make of him an extremely "wise fish," if an unsavory one—a mudcat, if you will. It occurred to him now that their mutual interests needed protection.

"Tain't possible you're spendin' all your coin on that little fairy you met down at Luigi's, is it?" he inquired.

Fritz scowled angrily, but Burrell was speaking in all sincerity. He looked his youthful charge in the eyes, as if he depended upon reading there the naked truth, rather than listen to the lie which he felt would be the inevitable outcome of his query. But Fritz disdained to discuss the matter. He stared at Burrell a moment, then turned his back on him. In no wise daunted, Burrell persevered. His tone and manner were those of a man discussing an entirely impersonal proposition.

"Maybe you don't know it, Fritz, but I was a pretty good jockey when I was a kid. I made lots of money, too—and I spent it, or got rid of it somehow. But one day the judges got wise to me, and then I quit makin' money. They're liable to take a tumble to you any old time, and when they do there's nothin' like havin' a little coin soaked away. I'd sooner have a dollar in a safe-deposit box than a hundred in silk skirts. You

can't cash skirts. What's more, you can lend a girl a million dollars, but you can't borrow a dime from her. Are you wise that you've got rid of four thousand dollars in the last ten days? Seems to me this Hazel party would bust the Bank of England—"

"I only let her have a little money until her father's estate is settled—"

"You take it from me, son, I'd sooner have one that ain't got no est te. They're cheaper. Hazel don't need no estate while she has you."

"You've got no right to talk about Miss Barton that way!" Fritz cried. His face was pale; his voice shrill with anger. "You talk like she was nobody. She's as good a girl as ever lived, and I know it!"

Burrell actually gaped in astonishment. That Fritz's friendship for the woman was entirely Platonic had never for a moment crossed his mind. For a moment he was staggered at this unexpected state of affairs. The situation, however, was not hard for him to understand. His father had been a racing man, and had started his son on his career as a race rider. Burrell had been reared at home, surrounded by good women, and suddenly he recalled how unsophisticated he himself had been at Fritz's age. Although his association of many years with the growing riders of the turf had dulled his sense of decency, he now recalled with quick admiration for Fritz the attitude of many of those young men toward the gentler sex. Sordid as was the valet, he felt a fleeting sense of pity at the awakening that was coming to the lad beside him. Gently he sought to enlighten him.

"I suppose you're going to marry this lady?"

Despite his kindly intentions, there crept into his tone a sarcastic note which Fritz did not fail to remark.

"I will if she'll have me," he flared.

"Have you asked her yet?"

"Yes."

"And she told you to wait a while—that you're too young to think of such a thing?" guessed Burrell.

Fritz marveled at his perspicacity.

"Well, she didn't say that exactly. She said a year from now would be time enough to think about it."

Burrell snorted contemptuously. "Yes, and in the meantime she'll be pullin' down every nickel you make. Fritz, you're a boob. Hereafter, instead of handing her your wad, just leave part of it with me. You're too generous, kid. We're partners, and I've got to get mine, or the business goes fluey. Have all the fun you want givin' your money away, but tend to business from now on. Savvy?"

Fritz made no reply. He was too hurt to trust himself to continue the conversation in its present channels, and, seeking to change the subject, he remarked:

"Guess who's going to take Mrs. Larue and Helen out for an automobile ride this evening?"

"The new judge," hazarded Burrell.

"No; but he was at the house to dinner. It's Miss Barton's cousin—the fellow that was with her that night in Luigi's. His name's Kellar."

"Wow, wow, wow!" was Burrell's reply to this piece of information—a reply so enigmatic that it worried Fritz, and kept the matter of Kellar foremost in his thoughts until his arrival at Hazel's flat to take her out to dinner. What more natural than that he should mention to Hazel the matter of Kellar's courtesy to the Larues?

The effect of this announcement was noticeable, or would have been noticeable to any one but Fritz. She complained of a headache, and immediately decided that she could not possibly join him at dinner. About eight o'clock she frankly asked him to leave her, but not until she had by adroit questioning ascertained the address of the Larue family in Golden Gate.

Both a Southern Pacific and a Key Route ferryboat leave San Francisco on a transbay trip at nine o'clock. Knowing that Fritz was in the habit of taking the Key Route in his travels to and from the track, Hazel Barton chose to become a passenger on the Southern Pacific boat bound for Oakland. Arrived in Oakland, she left the train at Seventh

and Broadway, hired the first taxicab she found disengaged, gave the driver the address of the Larues, and commanded him to stop on the corner nearest thereto.

Arrived at her objective point, she had scarcely raised the curtain and settled herself to wait when the headlights of Kellar's car flashed around the corner, and the party alighted in front of the Larue home.

If Kellar was invited by the Larues to enter, he did not accept the invitation. After seeing the ladies to their door, he bade them good night, and returned to his machine. In the interval, however, Hazel Barton had leaped from the taxi, handed her driver a bill, dismissed him, and walked swiftly toward Kellar's car. As the latter threw in his clutch he saw her standing in the glare of the headlights, hand upraised and commanding.

"The devil!" he snapped, exasperated at this unlooked-for apparition. There was a hint of consternation in his manner as he jammed down the brake. The woman climbed nimbly to the seat beside him.

"No, not the devil," she answered him shrilly, "the dub! You're the devil. Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

But Kellar had recovered his customary poise. He threw in the high speed, and shot away from the front of the Larue home in desperate haste, and not until he had turned the corner did he venture a reply.

"You ask where I've been," he replied lightly, "but evidently you knew where to find me. What do you want?"

"I want you. Who are those women?"

"Those ladies?" he corrected her. He laughed, refusing to be interrogated on a matter too obvious for discussion.

"You know where they live. Probably you know their names."

"I do know their names. What is Helen Larue to you, Bob Kellar? Answer me that!"

"Merely a friend. Surely you expect me to have *some* friends?"

"Not as young and pretty as that little upstate rube. Do you expect me to stay,

at home stringing that lovesick infant while you drive around with other women having a good time?"

At the reference to the jockey the entire situation was clear to Kellar.

"I suppose he told you I was going to take Mrs. Larue and her daughter for a drive?" he snapped. "The little crook!"

"Crook?" The woman laughed derisively. "You've certainly got your nerve, calling that poor child a crook. That boy could live to be a hundred years old without developing into a crook if it wasn't for men like you—yes, and women like me. I wish to Heaven he was five years older!"

"And then—"

"I'd marry him and make a man of him—and he'd make a woman of me."

The man laughed, and reached over and tooted the horn in derision. They were skimming rapidly through the silent streets toward the Mole, and the woman's menacing voice rose high above the purring of the motor.

"Don't kid me, Bob!" she cried. "You can't play them both ways with me. I don't blame you for getting stuck on that little country girl, but all the same you're not going to give me the drift. You just try it, and I'll crab your game good and plenty."

"Seems to me you'd be crabbing your own game as well. How about it, Hazel? Things have been coming pretty easy for you lately, haven't they? You'd pound a long time on a typewriter before you'd make three or four thousand a week."

"I'd be lots happier," she retorted bitterly.

Up to this time Kellar had merely been playing a part, sparring for time while his nimble brain schemed out a plan of action. He addressed her now in an altered voice:

"Why, you've been happy, haven't you, Hazel? I've tried to make you happy. Now, look here, little girl—you've come over here and jumped me, and I'll acknowledge that you made me angry for a few minutes, and I said things that would have been better left unsaid. But I hate to see you so sus-

picious of me. I could explain this whole matter to you in a word, but what's the use? You wouldn't believe me."

They rode along in silence. The intuition of her sex warned Hazel that Kellar was deceiving her, but her love for him was very great. She longed to receive his explanation, hoping that it would appear truthful, fearing that it would not. As her silence seemed to predicate consent, however, Kellar resumed:

"My dear girl, this is all in the line of business. I met Miss Larue and her mother at the track the other day, and the girl didn't seem to be able to talk of anything but this rider you've got in tow. There have been whispers of raw work at the track lately, and I wanted to get up close and ascertain if there was ever a breath of suspicion attached to young Engel. Also—and this is the most important reason—the racing association put a new judge in the stand last week—a chap named Henry Moncure. Moncure is very friendly with the Larues—calls there frequently. He dined there to-night, and, in fact, I think he is more likely to take up more of Miss Larue's time than one Bob Kellar. Well, I made it my business to meet him. I wanted to see if he'd relax and talk shop, in order that I might find out just how much he knows. I have it pretty straight that he's been put in the stand to try to find out a few things. Moncure was out in the car with us, but I dropped him at his hotel in Oakland before I brought the Larues home."

It was a plausible statement, in that it really did contain some elements of truth. Kellar was indeed perturbed because of rumors that had come to Holland's ears, and which that astute person had faithfully passed on to his principal. Moran and his valet had not been entirely unaware of the fact that they were under surveillance. Indeed, Kellar himself could not disabuse his mind of the idea that he, too, was being shadowed—the result, perhaps, of a suddenly active conscience, for since his meeting with Helen Larue and his recently formed determination to go in and win

her for his wife his conscience had troubled him more or less. This state of mind was further accentuated by her words of praise for Fritz Engel and the evident distaste of Hazel Barton to continue in her appointed rôle.

To the woman's mind, Kellar's explanation rang true. She was ashamed of her actions now, and her jealous suspicions gave way to fear for Kellar's reputation, and possibly her own.

"Do you think Moncure has any notion of our connection with the matter?" she inquired anxiously.

"He's very close-mouthed. That's the only reason I have to suspect him, for I don't see how it could be possible for him to implicate me. I never appear in anything."

"But how about me? Suppose they get suspicious of that boy, and put a gumshoe man on his trail? It'll lead to me, and——"

The underlying worry in Kellar's manner threw her into a panic. The last vestige of her anger was gone now; she was concerned only for the remnants of her reputation. She commenced to cry.

"Oh, Bob, dear," she wailed, "why will you persist in trying to make money that way? Why don't you give it up, and pay all of your attention to your business? Just suppose something should happen? You'd be ruined, and I—what would the folks at home say if they saw my picture in the papers as the heroine of a race-track scandal?"

"Perhaps it might be a good plan to lay low for a while," Kellar admitted. He was thinking of Helen Larue and the danger to his chances in that quarter in the event of unpleasant developments. "I guess I'll cut it out, Hazel," he added. "You can ditch the boy. The season isn't half over, but we've both done pretty well, and can afford to quit. Tell the youngster to skip along and sell his papers."

"I'm sure I hardly know how to get rid of him. He's perfectly crazy over me."

"Oh, you're too smart a woman not to be able to find a way."

She shook her head dubiously.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Robert Kellar dropped Judge Moncure at his hotel in Oakland, and continued on toward their home with Mrs. Larue and Helen, the racing official went at once to the desk for his mail, included among which was a large fat envelope. When he retired to his room, however, he did not at once proceed to the perusal of his letters. Instead, he sat on the edge of his bed for several minutes, immersed in thought, striving to analyze a nebulous suspicion which persisted in obtruding itself upon him.

Judge Moncure was thinking of Kellar, his erstwhile host on the auto ride. In his hand he now held the card which Kellar had given him at parting. He read it with renewed interest:

ROBERT P. KELLAR

Pres. The Kellar Coffee Co.
San Francisco

For a coffee merchant, Moncure thought Kellar had appeared that evening to be vitally interested in acquiring race-track information. In fact, Moncure was of rather a reticent disposition, and had a dislike for talking shop. He had to spend his days at the race track, but his evenings he preferred to spend otherwise, and more than once he had been at the point of being annoyed at the insistence with which Kellar switched the conversation back into racing channels.

"I hardly know whether he's a boor, or a gentleman striving to accommodate his conversation to the only subject he thinks I know anything about," was the decision at which the judge finally arrived. "I wonder why he gave me his business card rather than his visiting card? Looks like an attempt to pile it on. Could it be that he meant it as a hint for the salaried man to step aside for the man of wealth? I wonder now?"

He was still wondering as he slit open his mail. The contents of the large en-

velope he unfolded first. It proved to be a number of reports from the detective agency whose services the judge had enlisted in his campaign for honest racing.

The first of the reports was on Jockey Willie Moran. That young man appeared to have led the ordinary life of a jockey. He had dined well, attended the theater, retired to bed at a reasonable hour, and arisen in time to combine breakfast with luncheon. However, the young woman who accompanied him was the mistress of the apartment in which Master William was the "star boarder." She wore many diamonds and expensive clothing. Also, she bet heavily on the races, which she attended daily, coming across alone each afternoon with the racing crowd, and leaving each evening with Moran. The only regular visitor to Moran's apartment was his valet.

The judge next took up the report on Moran's valet. That worthy had slept in the tack room of the stable which employed Moran. He had performed his ordinary duties, pausing therein at ten a. m. to walk to the head of the stretch at the San Pablo track. There he had met Steve Holland, and conversed with him a few minutes.

Every day for a week Moncure had been receiving reports on Moran and his valet, Jockey Levens and his valet, and Jockey Clancy and his valet. In effect, all of these had been identical. The reports for the very first day showed that each valet had conversed with Steve Holland at some point in the racing enclosure during the forenoon. This circumstance had caused Moncure to have an operative placed on Holland's trail.

For three days Holland had been shadowed, and, in addition to the fact that he managed to meet the valets of Moran, Levens, and Clancy, Judge Moncure was surprised to discover that he regularly met the valet of Jockey Engel. The first day Moncure had supposed that the meeting between Holland and Burrell had been a chance one. The second day it had caused him to set his lips somewhat grimly and eagerly await the third day's report. Now he unfold-

ed the missive relating to the movements of Steve Holland with a feeling of mingled interest and distress which had not manifested itself when he discovered that the trail led to the other jockeys. His friendship for the Larue family had given him a personal interest in Fritz Engel.

To-night the report on Steve Holland was voluminous. "I wonder what Red Steve has been up to to-day?" Moncure mused.

It appeared that Red Steve had been up to considerable. In fact, he had put in an extremely busy day. In the morning, after meeting and conversing with the four valets, he had gone to a saloon just outside the race track, and telephoned. Then he had set out for San Francisco. At the corner of Mission Street and Anne Alley, he had waited until a man emerged from the store of the Kellar Coffee Company, when the two had seated themselves in an automobile at the corner, and engaged in a long conversation. Holland had immediately thereafter returned to the track. During the afternoon he met at the paddock gate, apparently waiting for him, the same man with whom he had conversed in the automobile in San Francisco. This man Holland had addressed as Mr. Kellar. They had walked together into the betting ring, where Kellar had in a surreptitious manner slipped to Holland what seemed to be a roll of bills. Thereafter Holland had moved about the track as usual. He had retired that night at his regular hour.

As Judge Moncure finished reading this report on Steve Holland, he folded it slowly and thoughtfully. He was not thinking of the impending scandal from the point of view of its bearing on the future of the racing game, but rather of its bearing on the future of these impressionable boys, trained in dishonesty by the greedy higher-ups.

With Moran, Levens, and Clancy, Moncure's association had been entirely official; but with Fritz Engel something of the personal had entered into their relations. He had sat at the same table with Engel in the Larue home; he had

seen the boy in an environment where every safeguard had been set to protect him.

The judge could not bring himself to believe that Fritz Engel, rider of less than two months' standing, could have been "reached" so soon. That homely russet countenance, with its shy smile, had appeared to Moncure to reflect honesty in every feature, and it was with a feeling of sadness rather than elation that he resolved to give orders next morning for operatives to shadow Fritz and Jim Burrell—and even Robert Kellar. The trail was too broad now not to be followed easily.

"It can't be that they've got Engel," Moncure reflected; "they're working on him, but they haven't landed him yet. I hope I'm in time to save him. It'll break old Larue's heart if this boy goes wrong. I'm sure they haven't got him yet," he reiterated to himself; "it's almost impossible. They're working on him—"

Suddenly Moncure bethought him of the ten days that Fritz had been left to his own devices while the Larues were at the ranch.

"By the gods of war, I'll have to move lively. And I'll beat them to it—to-night!"

He glanced at his watch, and saw that he had time to catch the eleven-o'clock train to the Mole. Hastily reaching for his overcoat and hat, he ran into the hall, and down the stairs, too eager to await the elevator. The train was pulling into the station just as he got there, and fifteen minutes later he boarded the ferryboat. He was worried and distressed at the turn which affairs had taken, and as the upper deck was deserted he walked backward and forward, turning over in his mind sundry plans which presented themselves.

Presently, as he approached the railing of the upper deck aft, he heard the husky "honk! honk!" of an auto horn as a big car rolled down the apron onto the main deck. Kellar glanced down. In the car sat Robert Kellar—a young woman beside him.

Moncure was surprised. It was but a few minutes since Kellar had dropped

him at his hotel, to proceed on his way with the Larues; and, considering the lateness of the hour, a very natural curiosity impelled Moncure to marvel at the dispatch with which the man had picked up a traveling companion—a woman, at that.

Suddenly Hazel Barton glanced upward, and as her face was revealed under her big white hat Moncure stepped quickly backward, and disappeared in the saloon.

"The woman from Luigi's!" he ejaculated. "Now, what was she doing in Oakland at this hour? She must have had an engagement with Kellar."

For some time Moncure speculated on the coincidence of this second meeting with Kellar and the girl whom he had seen dancing with Fritz Engel that night in Luigi's. He felt that there was a connection somewhere, but as yet the trail in that direction was too faint to follow.

The hands of the four clocks in the tower of the ferry building indicated eleven-forty-eight when Moncure left the boat and took a car for uptown. He went at once to a hotel, engaged a room, and immediately called up the apartment house where the detective's report alleged Moran to be living. He asked to be connected with the jockey's apartments, and presently Moran's sleepy voice came crossly over the wire:

"Well?"

"That you, Moran? This is Judge Moncure. I'm at the St. Francis, and I want to see you over here in my room within fifteen minutes. Understand? Within fifteen minutes."

"I—I'm in bed, judge. Wha-what's the matter?" stammered Moran.

"Nothing particular's the matter, but I must see you immediately. Put on your clothes, and come right over."

"All right, sir. I'll be there."

"Thank you, Moran. Don't trouble to go to the desk. Take the elevator. I'm in suite four hundred and two—fourth floor.

"Now," said the judge to himself, as he hung up the receiver, "we shall see what we shall see."

Moncure had stipulated fifteen min-

utes; but, spurred by anxiety, Moran arrived in ten, breathless and disheveled. He was wearing a traveling cap, and when bidden to enter seated himself on the edge of a divan, and twirled his headgear nervously.

Judge Moncure glared at the jockey. It was a long glare, and Moran's answering gaze faltered before it.

"How much did you get for pulling Filbert in the Christmas Handicap?"

The judge's voice was low-pitched, his manner easy and confident. Moran gaped, paled, flushed, and made no reply.

"Does Steve Holland pay you the same price for every horse you pull?"

Relief was at once evident in Moran's face. He found his voice, and answered confidently:

"I never pulled a horse in my life, judge, and I've never spoken to Steve Holland except two or three times when I've ridden some of his horses."

"Well, I dare say that's true, but your valet knows him well enough. He meets him at the quarter pole every morning at ten-thirty, and gets your orders for you. Now, you come through with what you know about this dirty business, Moran, if you ever expect to put a leg over a horse again."

"I ain't got nothin' to come through with," cried Moran desperately.

"Oh, yes, you have. Either you're going to come through or Steve Holland will, and if Holland beats you to it you'll have yourself to thank for the consequences."

Moran looked up craftily, and the judge, realizing that the jockey was too old and hardened to be caught easily, knew in that instant that Moran would not confess unless convinced that Moncure had sufficient evidence to convict him. The judge, therefore, made up his mind that bluff would not work in this instance. He decided to try a different course.

"See here, Willie," he continued, addressing the boy by his first name, and resting a sympathetic hand on the culprit's shoulder, "when I sent for you to-night it was with the intention of riding you roughshod. For more than

a year you have been the best race rider in America, and when I discovered that you were a thief I determined to make an example of you. You know, Willie, the farther they fall the harder they hit, and if I knock you from your perch you're going to hit awfully hard, and the sound of the fall is going to be heard all over this country. Since you've been in this room you've showed a disposition to lie and shield the men behind you. Do you think if I go after you instead of them that they'll protect you? Do you think they'll lie for you? Or will they consider that they did enough for you when they passed you the dirty money that you've squandered on May Garwood?"

At mention of the woman's name, Moran squirmed guiltily. Moncure was quick to note the impression his accusation had made, and continued:

"Do you think you'll still be the star boarder in her flat after you're ruled off and haven't a dollar in the world?"

He paused, waiting for a reply. The boy was silent, not daring to commit himself.

"Answer me!" thundered the judge.

"You can't rule me off if I didn't do anything," replied Moran doggedly.

"Why can't I? But we'll pass that. I don't have to have you *ruled* off, you know. You can be suspended indefinitely. Do you know what that word 'indefinitely' means? It means until there isn't a race horse running in America. Let me read you something, Willie."

He took a sheet of paper from his pocket, and read:

"December 18th: Herod. January 1st: Salmud. January 3d: Silverton. January 4th: Oxnard. January 6th: Lycurgus. January 8th: Filbert. January 9th—"

"Shall I go on, Willie?"

Moran's defiant attitude had vanished. He hung his head, and picked at the button on his cap.

"You see, Willie," continued the judge, "I've got it on you. I can tell you every time you've shaved, or had your shoes blacked; what you've eaten for dinner, what shows you've visited, and everything you've done almost since

the meeting opened. And"—he paused significantly—"just how much money your lady friend has lost at the races." The judge laughed patronizingly. "You're a funny little crook, Willie. You're stealing thousands, and she's buying a penny's worth of pasteboards with the money. By the way, my boy, where did you first meet Miss Garwood—at Luigi's Restaurant?"

All the signals of distress were flying as Moran looked up. Moncure realized that his question, shot at random, had found a vital spot. He smiled again, and continued:

"You see, I wasn't simply boasting when I told you I knew all about you."

Moncure tried to be brave, but he was still a boy. He struggled against his tears.

"What do you want me to do, judge?" he faltered.

"I want you to be on the square with yourself—and with me. You're too good a rider for us to lose your services, Willie, and I have a notion that away down low you're not a money-grabbing crook. You haven't gotten anything out of all you've stolen. The man that's handling you is handling some of the other boys here, and he's the fellow I'm after. I want the man higher up. Do you think, if I give you a chance to get out of this mess and cut loose from the people who are making a fool of you, that you can go along and behave yourself?"

"I think so, sir."

"Now you're getting sensible. We understand each other. Tell me all about it, Willie."

"There ain't anything to tell, sir—sure there ain't," he insisted, as he saw the judge's face darken. "I've just been pullin' 'em. That's a fact. My valet tells me what ones to take, and passes me the money. I'm not supposed to know where it comes from, but, of course, he told me he got it from Steve Holland. That's all I know."

As the sordid story came tumbling from the boy's lips it seemed that he was glad to have the matter over with at last. Moncure's kindly nature expanded in sympathy with the young-

ster's keen distress. The lad reminded the judge of a little trapped animal. And this possibly was not the only culprit who must be trapped. There was Engel, dear to the hearts of Moncure's best friends, and he realized how bitterly they would be affected at any damaging revelations involving the boy's character. Shrewdly the judge proceeded on his quest for information which would convict or exonerate Fritz. If Moran knew anything, the judge determined to worm it out of him now.

"Steve Holland's got quite a string of jockeys, Willie. He has Levens and Clancy and Engel—he ought to be able to pick the winner of any race in which you're all riding."

The habit of keeping his own counsel was strong in Moran. His loyalty to his confrères in the conspiracy extended to his comrades of the pigskin. He had no definite knowledge of what Levens, Clancy, and Engel were doing, and if he had he would not willingly have implicated Levens and Clancy in his own unfortunate predicament. But for Fritz Engel Moran felt no friendship.

In the first place, Engel had displaced him as the premier rider at the San Pablo track, which naturally involved a little matter of professional jealousy. In the serene consciousness of proficiency, Engel had of late taken to gibing at Moran when the two happened to be hooked up in a close finish, and the memory of a solid blow dexterously planted at the point of his chin by the red-topped rider still lingered in Moran's mind.

May Garwood, too, had suffered pangs of jealousy because of the finery which Fritz Engel's gullibility enabled Hazel Barton to flaunt in her face, and for this she had not neglected to complain to her knight of the saddle. Consequently, if Moran had to fall, he was not averse to dragging Engel with him.

"I don't know—I guess you've got the goods on 'em," Moran muttered. "Dutch fell for a girl, the same as I did."

Moncure was startled. Instantly there came to his mind the memory of the baby face of the woman he had seen at Luigi's Restaurant, dragging the heavy-footed boy about the dancing

space—the same face which but an hour ago had looked up at him from the front seat of Robert Kellar's car. Fritz's sad little story was now as plain to Moncure as if spread on a printed page. He concealed his surprise, however, and continued, with affected tolerance:

"Yes, I've seen the lady. But Engel has kept it very dark. How did you find out about her?"

"Hazel Barton is a friend of May's. They sit together at the race track every day."

"Where does she live?"

Moran told him.

"All right, Willie. I guess that's about all I need you for to-night. Before you go, however, I'll just put that confession of yours in writing. I want you to sign it."

Although Fritz had succeeded in obtaining permission to sleep at the track, he still took his meals at the Larue home. Owing to the fact that he had to be in the jockey room shortly after twelve o'clock, he had his midday meal at half after eleven. Judge Moncure was familiar with this procedure, and, in the forenoon of the day following Moran's confession, Fritz was surprised, after leaving the house, to find Judge Moncure waiting for him at the corner.

The judge waived the formality of his customary pleasant salutation, and with his very first question Fritz scented trouble.

"Fritz, have you seen Burrell this morning?"

"Yes, sir. But he seldom comes out here."

"I know that. Has he given you your instructions for this afternoon?"

"What instructions? What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean instructions as to what horses you're to pull this afternoon. Never mind trying to lie out of it, Fritz. I've got the deadwood on you, and I don't want to go beating about the bush with you. If you don't own up, I'll have Pop Larue ask you a few questions."

At the threat, the mention of Larue's name, and a sudden feeling that beyond

a doubt the judge was fully conversant with the details of all his misdeeds, Fritz surrendered. He was no hardened offender like Moran, and the suddenness of the judge's attack was irresistible. He seized Moncure's hand, and commenced to cry.

"Oh, please, judge, don't tell Pop Larue—please don't! I won't lie to you."

"Well, what are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Nothing, sir. Claxton can't beat Northbrae in the match race, but I'm to see that he don't, anyhow."

"Who told you Claxton couldn't beat Northbrae?"

Fritz hesitated, and Moncure promptly answered his own question:

"Jim Burrell told you. Isn't that right?"

Fritz nodded, and dug his fists into his eyes.

"How many other horses has he told you couldn't win?"

"I can't remember. Eight or ten—maybe a dozen."

"How much money do you get for thinking horses can't win?"

"Five hundred dollars."

The magnitude of the bribe staggered the judge. "Steve Holland can't produce that kind of money," was the thought that came to him; and his mind harked back to the report of the operative who had shadowed Holland. "That's the money Kellar passed to Holland in the betting ring. So Kellar's the man behind, after all."

"Well, you'll have to turn all that money back, Fritz. Where is it?" he continued.

The terror in the boy's face was pitiful to behold.

"I haven't got it, judge—oh, judge, I haven't got it!" he whimpered.

"Hazel Barton's got it, eh?"

"I loaned it to her. She's going to give it back to me as soon as her father's estate is settled."

The judge could not forbear a smile. After all, the affair might have been worse, and he was conscious of a feeling of gratitude toward the woman whose depravity, after all, appeared to have its limitations.

"Well, my boy, where is this all going to end? What do you figure on doing?"

"I dunno," replied the boy truthfully. Here was a contingency which had not before presented itself.

"Well, what do you think I ought to do?" queried the judge.

"I don't care what you do, so long as you don't tell Pop Larue," sobbed Fritz hopelessly. "He'll feel terrible when he finds out what I've been doing. I don't care what becomes of me, but I don't want pop to feel badly. He's the only friend I have. Don't let me ride any more, but don't tell pop why."

"But how am I to avoid telling him? You know what happens to boys who pull horses. They're ruled off the turf, and if you're ruled off Mr. Larue is certain to find it out. I can't promise not to tell him." The judge was thoughtful for a moment. "Well, you'll have to ride out your engagements for to-day, and you must ride to win. Then we'll see what can be done about it. Can I trust you to try with Claxton?"

"Oh, sure, I'll try!"

"And if I let you ride will you promise me that you won't tell Burrell or anybody else about this talk we've had until I give you permission to do so?"

Fritz made him a fervent promise.

"Well, then, you run along to the jockey room; and dry those tears before you get there. We mustn't be seen together."

They parted, Fritz to continue on his way to the jockey room, Moncure to the nearest telegraph station, where he wired William Larue that his presence was urgently needed at San Pablo.

CHAPTER XIV.

The match down for decision that afternoon was the result of bitter feeling between the owners of Claxton and Northbrae. In a race a few days previous Claxton, with Moran up, had been returned a winner, but only after a serious jam had taken place at the head of the stretch—a jam which Engel, who rode Northbrae, had claimed was the direct result of unfair riding on the part of Moran.

Fritz had claimed a foul, which might have been allowed by the judges had Northbrae finished second or third, but to such an extent had he been impeded that he failed to finish in the first four.

The owner of Northbrae, angered at his ill fortune, had attributed it as much to what he termed the stupidity of Engel as to the tactics of Moran, and had offered to wager a thousand dollars that with riders reversed his horse could beat Claxton.

The controversy had been aired in the newspapers until a high pitch of public interest had been aroused. Opinions were about equally divided as to the merits of the respective champions. The racing association, quick to grasp an opportunity to add an attractive feature to its program, had added five hundred dollars to the two thousand dollars wagered, and the race was to be run over again, winner to take all.

"Here's the chance for a whale of a clean-up," suggested the ever-alert Steve Holland to Kellar, when they met in the automobile that morning. "We can bet on either horse we wish, and there's no possibility of making a mistake."

"I don't know, Steve. I'm getting soured on this whole business. I don't like the idea of gumshoe men following our people. The first thing we know they'll pick up you or me. They might even chance upon Hazel. She's scared to death, and I don't trust her any more. She's a little jealous of me, and you can never tell what a woman will do; and moreover she's developing a conscience about our friend Engel. I promised her last night I'd cut out racing, and told her to give the boy his walking papers. She's right, Holland. It's getting dangerous, and I think we'd better pass it up."

"Pass it up!" wheezed Holland. His amazement was such that it all but brought on an attack of asthma. "Why, Mr. Kellar, it's the softest thing we've had yet. I agree with you that we'd better lay low for the rest of the season, and it's up to you to pull out if you want to, but I'll take one more chance. If you mean to cut loose, say so now, and I'll get somebody else to go to it."

The idea of a third person reaping the benefit of Kellar's schemes and cash outlay was sufficient to decide him. After all, it was to be his last fixed race. Why not make it a hummer? Why, indeed? As Steve Holland had remarked, it was the softest thing they had had thus far. Two "fixed" jockeys in a match race! The idea took possession of Kellar. It was too good a thing to pass by; and, then, it was to be his last race.

"Well, Steve," he said, smiling, "we'll take one grand final crack at them, and then I'm through with the bangtails. Straight business for mine hereafter. As long as this race is to be the last, let's make it the best. We can't spread more than twenty-five thousand dollars in the ring here, but I'll wire the boys out of town to bet the bank roll in the pool rooms. I guess I've got close to a hundred thousand dollars in the hands of my agents scattered about the country, and I'll dig up about a hundred thousand more, and wire it on. You're right, Steve. It's too easy. We'll gather the nickels and dimes together, and bet it all."

Holland was elated, and permitted himself his first familiarity with his employer. He slapped Kellar on the shoulder.

"That's the talk! Go to it, old sport! By the Lord, the bookies'll date time from the day you tore out of the game. I'm goin' to chase uptown and clean my safe-deposit box of every bean."

He gasped and coughed. In the midst of his merriment his asthma caught him unawares, and for five minutes he wept and sputtered.

His familiarity angered Kellar, who had always felt for his lieutenant a secret disgust.

"Get out!" he commanded roughly, and elbowed Holland out of the car. He followed, cranked up, and in a brief ten seconds was on his way to the telegraph office, there to wire his agents in the different betting centers of the country:

Take opening price on Northbrae. Bet all the money you have belonging to me.

"Well, Miss Larue, I presume Fritz has your financial as well as moral support in the match race?"

With this salutation, Kellar lifted his hat and joined Mrs. Larue and Helen at their usual station on the lawn in front of the clubhouse.

"Did Helen never tell you that she doesn't bet?" inquired Mrs. Larue icily.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," Kellar replied easily. "My remark was more or less perfunctory. I suppose one gets into the habit of supposing that everybody bets, or would like to, when they come to the races."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Larue's rebuke was not lost on Kellar, and his manner was thereafter more deferential.

"Well, I'm an unregenerate sort of chap," he continued pleasantly. "I must confess that I've staked a couple of dollars on the result of the race. I favor Northbrae."

Mrs. Larue, who viewed with maternal solicitude the evident interest of the handsome coffee merchant in her daughter, was about to enter a few discreet inquiries touching the exact amount of his wager; but the arrival of Claxton and Northbrae at the post right in front of the stand prevented.

With two such riders as Moran and Engel, there was nothing to choose between their mounts at the start. Like a team, the animals bounded away from the barrier, and like a team they raced around the first turn. By virtue of being number one, Northbrae held the rail. Having no orders to the contrary, Moran was doing his best to win, and by virtue also of this lack of orders he suspected that Engel was not.

"I'll put the judge wise to this Dutch galoot," thought Moran, mindful of his recent conversation with Judge Moncure. "If he pulls Claxton, he'll have to break his jaw. I'll make this a walkin' match instead of a horse race."

With this idea in mind, he took a strong hold on Northbrae, and that despite the fact that the horse was naturally a very slow beginner. Engel was surprised. Claxton possessed more actual speed than Northbrae, and could outrun him at any stage of the race, a

circumstance of which Fritz intended to take advantage. His plan of campaign was to take back to Northbrae during the early stages, and try to outrun him through the final furlong. In order to do this, it would be necessary to restrain his mount without fighting him—a feat for which his lightness of hand peculiarly fitted him. When Moran purposely made the pace slow, it was as water on Fritz's wheel.

During the slow journey up the back stretch and around the far turn, Moran lowered his face so that his arm concealed from Fritz a sarcastic grin. Rounding for home, he could not refrain a gibe at the rider whose ruin he believed he was encompassing.

"Northbrae's a stretch horse. You'd better go on with that hound," he sneered.

To his surprise, Fritz accepted his suggestion. Engel suddenly set Claxton down, and the horse, never having been extended, and having the foot over his opponent, flashed into the lead.

It was only at that moment that Moran awoke to the fact that it was a horse race, not a hippodrome. He clucked to Northbrae, and let out his wraps. With the courage characteristic of him, Northbrae responded. Accustomed to making his run at the end of a race, he clenched the bit in his teeth, and strove to pass his rival, but he found no tired adversary to succumb easily to his rush. Head and tail up, Claxton was galloping easily along with no indication of a desire to quit.

Angry curses flowed from Moran's lips as he realized how he had duped himself. In his consternation and chagrin, he took to the whip. But Northbrae's courage was of no avail—he was a beaten horse.

As Claxton made his unexpected run and drew clear of Northbrae, Kellar, gazing through his field glasses, could hardly believe his eyes.

"Double-crossed!" he groaned, oblivious to the presence of Mrs. Larue and Helen. Fortunately for him, they were too excited to understand, or to observe him as he dropped the glasses from his trembling hands, leaving them

to dangle from the cord fixed about his neck. He had no further use for them. They could only show him Fritz Engel riding a winning race, when he, the jockey's master, had ordered a losing one. He knew that he had forfeited a fortune. He leaned against the rail, his eyes staring, his handsome face white and twitching.

In the infield, Steve Holland danced and shrieked like a wild red devil.

"Come on with him, Willie—come on with him!" he raved, urging to greater effort the boy, whose whip rose and fell with the regularity of a flail.

"I'll kill that Dutch hound!" he yelled, as he ran with the horses toward the finish. It was his intention to do violence to Engel, for in that supreme moment Steve Holland was not human. The knowledge that after all his months of scheming this boy had in one moment transformed him from a prosperous owner to a penniless tout rendered him heedless of everything save an animal desire to crush the jockey.

Robbed of his strength by the disease which gripped his lungs, he stumbled, and almost fell. His breath failed, and he stopped—bent double, his arms clasped across his chest as if in a frantic effort to pluck out the demon that clawed at his vitals. A quivering, pitiful figure, he swayed from side to side, choking with rage and pain, and unable to see the finish through his tears.

Claxton passed the post hard held, two lengths in front of the disgraced Northbrae. As he proudly bore his rider back to the pagoda, the acclaim of the multitude was lavished impartially upon horse and boy. The leader of the track band—a dark, dried-up little Portuguese, leaped upon a chair, and, after waving his cornet frantically for half a minute, managed to gather several of his demoralized musicians about him.

"*Der Faderland—der Faderland!*" he shouted, and from the instruments of the excited musicians there rose discordantly over the howls of the crowd the strains of the German anthem—a well-meant but misdirected tribute to the supposed nativity of "Dutch" Engel.

The money-mad crowd, cheering hys-

terically, refused to be satisfied. Salvo after salvo of applause rent the air until Engel had again been hoisted upon Claxton, and repeatedly doffed his brave silk cap.

It was a wonderful clean-up. Serene in their faith in their idol, the racing public had wagered consistently on Engel's mount. The giant commission poured into the ring by Kellar and Holland had forced Northbrae into decided favoritism, and the public, glad of an opportunity for comparatively long odds, had taken the bait, and wiped out the conspirators hook, line, and sinker.

The tumult and the shouting had not yet died away when Jim Burrell arrived and stood at the door of the scale room, waiting for Fritz. He managed to control himself until they had proceeded a few yards on their way to the paddock. Then he burst forth.

"You double-crossin' Dutch sneak!" he raved. "I'll beat you to a pulp when I get you to the barn."

Fritz stopped, and eyed his valet sadly.

"I've ridden my last race," he announced. "So I won't need a valet after to-day. You're fired, Burrell."

The mudcat's mouth opened to pour forth invective upon the boy, but the words refused to come. He gaped like an imbecile, and Fritz resumed his way to the jockey room.

Burrell hurried after him. "What did you do it for?" he pleaded. "What's wrong with you? You know I never bet, but I had Red Steve stake every cent of the easy money for me on this race. You got your orders, and we played Northbrae to win. *To win—understand?* Boy, I'm cleaned! You can't throw me down like this. This was to be the last race, the big killin', the get-away money. Why did you scramble the eggs, Fritz? Why?"

"I don't want any more easy money," the boy replied listlessly. He lapsed into his old-time sullenness, refusing to discuss the matter further. Burrell knew the futility of pressing him for information. The mudcat was completely mystified.

As for Kellar, the final race of the

day had been run before he recovered his equilibrium. At first the knowledge of the disaster which had overtaken him—for he had lost a great deal more money than he could afford—had seemed to numb his brain. As in a dream, he saw the horses finish, saw the sea of tense faces around him, heard the wild shouts of victory—and clung weakly to the fence. Gradually, however, his thoughts turned to the author of his woe, and he fled to the paddock gate to meet Steve Holland.

"What does Burrell say?" he demanded.

"He doesn't know," faltered the red schemer.

"But I know," Kellar retorted tremulously. "It's that woman, Hazel Barton. She was jealous of me, and I was fool enough to think I could fool a woman. She's double-crossed us, Steve. She told the boy to ride to win."

When Fritz, accompanied by Jim Burrell, returned to the barn, the valet, while secretly thirsting to make good his threat and beat the boy to a pulp, was nevertheless too concerned for his own immediate future and the knowledge of the summary vengeance which William Larue would wreak upon him to come to an open breach with the rider. He attempted to fathom the reason back of Fritz's extraordinary act, but the boy was still sullen, and Burrell decided to abandon the subject for the present. Perhaps in the morning the boy's views might be changed; and, as Burrell was anxious to get into communication with Steve Holland, he tossed Fritz's belongings into the tack room, and hurried away.

When Fritz Engel left the barn on his way home for dinner, his feelings were a curious conglomeration of terror at what the next day would bring forth and pride in the ovation accorded him for the honest and skillful ride he had given Claxton. It was a sad commentary on the uncertainties of life that this day—the proudest in his career as a rider—should also have been the most humiliating.

Strange to relate, throughout the

afternoon he had not once thought of Hazel Barton. Larue's affection and approbation seemed to him the only things in life worth having now that both seemed lost to him forever. He wondered how he was ever to face the lanky Tennessean and his kindly "Hello, sonny! How's my boy been behaving?"

The bitter tears of misery and shame started to his eyes, blinding him to such an extent that he did not observe Judge Moncure on the corner, apparently waiting for him. He started as the judge slipped an arm in his.

"I've had a telegram from Mr. Larue, Fritz," said the judge. "He will be home to-morrow morning."

Fritz shivered. "You promised you wouldn't tell," he accused the judge.

"No, my boy, I didn't promise that. I couldn't. But possibly I won't have to. Suppose you tell him yourself?"

The boy moaned in his anguish, but Moncure was inexorable. He proffered no sympathy.

"Does he have to be told?" wailed Fritz.

"Yes. Somebody has to tell him, and I don't care for the job. But if you don't tell him I must. He'll think more of you if you go to him and own up. Maybe he'll think he was a little bit to blame himself, leaving you here to shift alone. He may not be too hard on you, and after you tell him I'll put in a good word for you."

"You think I'm afraid to tell him, don't you?" The Celtic courage was rising in the face of his desperate situation. "It ain't that, judge. I don't want pop to feel bad."

"He'll feel worse to have the story reach him first from somebody else and if he has to come to you and ask you about it."

"I'll meet him at the train to-morrow morning, and tell him about it," Fritz replied bravely.

"Word of honor?" Moncure was very serious.

Fritz delivered himself of the ancient oath of childhood:

"I hope to die if I don't."

"That's good enough for me. And

now, Fritz, my boy, what about your friend Hazel."

The mention of the girl's name came to Fritz as a shock. He had not thought of her in connection with his exposé as a crooked rider.

"She'll be sorry, of course. But," he added hopefully, "maybe she'll never find out."

"She knows all about it right now."

Fritz looked at the judge, unable to account for this remarkable statement. "She's the one who engineered this whole deal," continued Moncure.

The boy was about to protest, but the judge silenced him:

"You listen to me. Wait until I get through before you cut in. In the first place, how old do you think Hazel Barton is?"

"Eighteen. She told me so."

"She's nearer thirty. And she hasn't any estate coming to her. She told you she loved you the very first time you met her, and then she borrowed money from you when she had no way of repaying it. Do you think a nice girl would do that? Would Helen Larue do such a thing? You had to be crooked to get the money Hazel Barton wanted, and now that you've quit being crooked she'll have no further use for you. I'm willing to bet you a new hat, Fritz, that if you go to see her to-night she won't even speak to you."

Had any one but Judge Moncure or Pop Larue made this extraordinary statement, Fritz would have refused to listen to it, or else entered into angry expostulation. As it was, the judge's words merely added to his distress without in any way convincing him. As Moncure had foreseen, he determined immediately to visit Hazel, and reassure himself.

A car bound for Oakland was approaching, and the judge prepared to leave.

"Be sure you meet Pop Larue at the Sixteenth Street Station at eight-fifteen to-morrow morning, and make a clean breast of it all."

He swung aboard the car. "Now to make certain that the woman turns him down," he soliloquized. "Nasty job this

coppering Cupid. Makes me feel like a crook myself."

Instead of returning to his hotel, Moncure hurried at once to San Francisco. He ate on the ferryboat, for it was part of his plan to meet Hazel Barton before Fritz's arrival. He believed that immediately after dinner the boy would start for the city, and it was the judge's intention to forestall a possible meeting of Fritz with the woman. Upon arriving in San Francisco, he proceeded at once to Hazel Barton's flat.

His advent threw the little siren into the utmost consternation, a condition which Moncure was quick to perceive, and of which he took prompt advantage. Following up the methods of procedure adopted in the cases of Moran and Engel, he came to the point at once.

"Miss Barton," he said, "I've come here to do you a service—not essentially on your own account, but because of a desire to avoid publicity in a matter which will benefit no one if exploited. The stewards of the jockey club have become aware of a combination which is handling several of the prominent riders at San Pablo—among others, a friend of yours, Fritz Engel. An official investigation will be held to-morrow morning at ten o'clock. There are certain questions which it is necessary to ask you, and I am here to put those questions to you if you care to answer them now. If not, we would like to have you present at the offices of the jockey club to-morrow; that is, if you have the interest of young Engel at heart."

He paused, watching the effect of his words. The woman had grown pale under her rouge. Once or twice she wet her lips, and her fingers, laden with rings, clasped and unclasped nervously. At the first intimation of publicity, she had been terribly frightened, but the judge's suggestion that this unwelcome procedure might be avoided prompted her now to temporize.

"Well," she drawled, "what has all this to do with me?"

"You are friendly with Fritz Engel?"

"Yes. He's a dear little fellow, and I'm very fond of him."

"You will pardon me if I seem over-frank," said Moncure; "but is it not a fact that he has been very generous to you?"

"Oh, yes. He insisted upon making me a few presents—but, then, he makes a great deal of money."

"Is it possible that you are not aware of the manner in which he makes his money?"

"Really, Mr. Moncure, I have never given the matter any thought."

"Oh, quite so! I had an idea that your friend, Mr. Robert Kellar, might have given you some information on the subject."

The shot went home. The woman stood up, her lips parted, her breast heaving. She seemed searching for a reply, but the words did not frame themselves with the accustomed glibness. Instead, she stared at him with rather a wintry smile which she strove to make expressive of amusement.

"Well?"

At that moment the telephone rang in the hall. The Japanese maid answered the call, and, coming into the room, she informed her mistress that Mr. Kellar was on the line.

Moncure almost grinned as the woman glided past him. She strove to attain the rôle of the grande dame, and Moncure, knowing her for what she was, thought she really did it very well, although the wonder was that she did not slap the maid for her inopportune stupidity.

Five minutes later it was a different woman who strode into the room with something of the feline grace of a tigress about to spring. Tears had eroded little runways down her cheeks, and her eyes were blazing. Gone was her grand manner now; likewise the carefully selected speech with which she had striven to sustain it. She stood before him, unashamed of her true colors, a harpy in very truth.

"Bob Kellar—you asked me about him. Well, he's the guy. He sicked me onto Engel, and I made a fool of the kid so Kellar could make a crook of him. Bob Kellar makes the plans, and Steve Holland carries them out. Kellar puts

up all the money, makes all the winnings, and gives Holland a fat rake-off. Holland passes the word and the coin. He keeps a thousand dollars on deposit with Luigi for emergencies. The valets are the go-betweens."

"Something has occurred to change your attitude in this matter," Moncure remarked dryly, as she paused in her denunciation. He was minded to profit by her anger-inspired revelations.

She smiled bitterly, and nodded in the direction of the telephone.

"He's through with me now. He doesn't need my poor services any longer." She swept her white arm dramatically to indicate the rich furnishings of the room. "This—and this—it's all his, and to-morrow I get out. He's thrown me down—says I double-crossed him. But I'm the one that's double-crossed, and I guess you know it. I hope you rule him off. I wish you could hang him——"

"Pray do not excite yourself, Miss Barton," Moncure interrupted. "I can assure you that Mr. Kellar will get his—quickly. Also his friends. They'll never dare show their noses on a race track in America again. But how about this boy Engel? Is he so greatly to blame that he should be punished?"

Miss Barton softened.

"Oh, judge, don't rule him off! The poor little kid! He hasn't profited. I wheedled him out of every dollar he stole."

"But if he continues to ride, how do I know that you won't continue to fleece him?"

"I'm bad enough," the girl replied humbly; "but I promise you I'll not go any farther. We were both tools of Kellar."

"But he thinks you love him. You'll have to open his eyes."

"I will—I will."

"And don't be gentle about it. He's a hard-headed little customer, and he'll be here to-night without a doubt. If you don't mind, I'll stay until he arrives. I'd like to hear what you say to him."

He waited in the flat until the bell rang. The woman opened the door into

the hall, and they both stood there listening while the Japanese maid bore to the youthful Lothario this curt message:

"You go 'way. Miss Barton say she never want to see you no more."

Moncure heard Fritz gasp. That was all. He waited a few minutes, until he judged that the coast was clear; then, taking his hat and stick, he turned to make his adieus.

"Thank you, Miss Barton——" he began gravely. She interrupted.

"I thank you, sir—for that poor boy." She turned away. "Good-by."

Moncure hesitated. "If you don't mind, Miss Barton, I should like to shake hands with you."

"You're right. It won't rub off." There was a catch in her voice. "Thank you once more."

Judge Moncure was still in bed next morning when there came a knock at his door. On the heels of the bell boy, William Larue entered, dragging Fritz Engel by the hand.

"What's this yarn Fritz has been telling me, Henry?" demanded the big rancher.

"I fear it's all true. Sit down, sir, and let me tell you the story from beginning to end."

"And so the race track's a den of thieves?" was the horseman's comment when the tale was done.

"Hardly that, Mr. Larue, but it's bad enough."

"Is it possible that in two weeks my boy could be tarred like this?"

"Why not? You left him to his own devices—it's not remarkable. Indeed, it would be strange if a colt without a pedigree should prove a thoroughbred."

"But Fritz is a thoroughbred. If he's developed a bad habit, it's because he's been poorly handled. I'm afraid I'm not much of a trainer."

"What shall we do about this matter?"

"Do?" echoed Larue. "Do? Why, we'll quit this rotten game—that's what we'll do! There was a time when it was a gentleman's sport, but not now. I'm through. Come, Fritz—back to the soil and the simple life. That's the place for us—farmers. I'll fix it with Engel to relinquish his claim on you."

Fritz could only squeeze the big hand of the rancher. There was a lump in his throat that forbade speech.

Judge Moncure's eyes sparkled.

"By Jupiter, sir, I think you're right. Green fields and kind-faced cows for me, too—if Helen says the word." The judge was very serious now. "May I ask her, sir?"

"Think we could use a hired man on the ranch, sonny?" asked Larue, smiling down at Fritz.

"You bet we could, pop!"

"Well, then, Henry, my boy," replied the rancher, "go up to the house and make your nomination for the Alfalfa Stakes."



AN OUTBREAK OF HARSH CRITICISM

PRESIDENT TAFT rarely says unkind things about the men with whom he comes in contact in public life. But, when he does unlimber for a bombardment, he generally puts in a center shot—hot and irresistible.

Not long ago he was talking about an officeholder whom he had discharged for the good of the service.

"He was a bad one," criticized Taft. "He had a bad streak all through him. He had the distinction of putting into my mind an idea which nobody else had been able to suggest to me. When he was turned out of his job, I felt that it would be wise to employ an art expert to see whether he had substituted fakes for the oil paintings on the walls of the public buildings in which he had worked."

Hands Up!

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Lost Cabin Mine," Etc.

This is a novel you *must* read, whether you have a prejudice against serials or not. It is so good, so vivid, so well-written that we don't want you to miss it. It is human to the very core. Nothing has pleased us more for a great many years than this autobiographical account of a young fellow's friendship with an outlaw. Train robber, philosopher, critic of morals, "white" man through and through, "the smartest bad man and the prettiest that ever terrorized a community"—that is the Apache Kid, whose principal greeting is "HANDS UP!" An astonishing fellow who figures in more than one fracas that brings him loot, and yet has the temerity to sit in judgment on the United States and declare that "America is too full of the graft spirit." A masterly novel this, viewed from any standpoint.

CHAPTER I.

WHY I WENT WEST.

THERE has been a good deal of talk, one way or another, about the Apache Kid. The yellow press made capital out of him just as they have made capital out of many another figure on the frontier—Texas Jack, Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane.

Now, I knew the Apache Kid. I was mixed up in the last wild days of his life, and, while not seeking to whitewash him, I should like to tell—to all whom it may concern—my view of that extraordinary man.

It is common knowledge that he was liked. Not only cowboys and miners who knew him, but your moneyed person, your capitalist even, can find a sigh for Apache Kid, the holdup man. I have known two men, prominent, respected, one "interested in mines," the other a great ranch owner and dabbler in booms, both of whom had met Apache in their travels about the West. Both spoke of him with regret, with much more of a shake of the head over his misguided,

or rudderless life, and his wild end, than with the "bully good riddance" air that might be expected. There was reason for it.

I had better, to begin with, explain how I came to the sagebrush country of the Apache Kid, because, in a new country, the men one meets there have had some concussion, good or bad, in their lives to boost them so far. And the reason for their being in the new country is a kind of striking of the pitchfork to get their key.

That beginning of things I must tell quite frankly, bolstering myself up to the explanation by the thought that most young men—boys, let me say—for I was but a boy—and though I say "most young men," I am talking of myself!—have a kind of what the Scots call "daftness" in them, and are generally exceedingly sorry for themselves, magnificent in their woes, and grandiloquent in their hopes.

I had wanted, in the old country, to be a sheep farmer. My mother had, however, coaxed me to go in for a scholarship at my school. We spent our summer holidays, I remember, that

year, after I had sat for the examination, in the Isle of Arran in the Firth of Clyde, an island that appeals to the youngster because of its moors, its cliffs and corries, its high rocks, and adders in the heather.

All through that vacation I was out and about on the hills with the shepherd, and working in the dips. My father would come and watch me clutch adroitly a sheep by the horns, swing my leg over it, and straddle it to the tank, plunge it in, walk alongside, yank it up at the end, and send it down to the pen among the other baptized ones. I say this not sacrilegiously now, but recalling an unfortunate expression used at the time.

My mother—bless her—was of the old school, and had had hopes that I might become a minister of the gospel, which several boyish escapades had dashed. My father and she had little in common; and one day, as he watched us working in the dips, my mother came along, under her sunshade, from the farm, and stood looking on, half sad, half proud. My father was wholly proud of the kid—viz., me—at the moment, because I had pinioned a particularly recalcitrant ram between my knees, and, wriggle his head as he would, I was his master. The farm boys stopped to laugh and egg me on, just as I have seen, since then, cowboys roar with laughter when some branded two-year-old—who slipped through unbranded at one year—has arisen and made a disturbance in a corral.

My father turned about, and, seeing my mother, gave his sniff that prefaced a jocular remark, and, said he:

"I think you'd better be glad that the boy can baptize sheep instead of mortals."

My mother stiffened under the sunshade, held it up rigidly over her head, instead of letting it make a pretty circle behind her head and shoulders. She walked sadly back to the farm, and wrote a letter straightway to her minister, asking him his views on sheep farming for a young man. The parson wrote back that sheep farming was a lazy life.

5A

My father was a queer old fellow. He was a determined-enough man, but very "jack-easy," as the word is. He would dismiss things with a "Pshaw—don't worry me!" just when the looker-on expected him to fight to the end for his own view, would give his shoulders a dismissing shrug, and retire to the library to read his "*Don Quixote*," in Spanish, with his feet on the mantelpiece.

When this letter arrived my mother handed it to him, and he read it with eyes widening and widening, held it in a trembling hand, and bellowed out:

"What has he got to do with it? Perfect nonsense! What a woman! What a woman! He's a shepherd of souls that—that—that—*parson*! What does he know about mutton?"

And then my dad seemed to listen to the echo of his voice, and, alas, saw the humor of his remark. He sat back and laughed at himself, then got up, flicked the letter, said: "Far better give the boy a chance. I wish my father had let me follow my instincts—" and retired to smoke many cigars and read "*Don Quixote*" in the Spanish.

But evidently he could not settle. I think, looking back on him, that he tried too much to dismiss things instead of to mend them. He had, nevertheless, quite an ordeal of it dismissing that letter. It came on a Friday, and all Saturday he was glum, and on Sunday so glum that he spent the forenoon yarning with the stableboy and the plowman. To my great delight, from where I sat—glum as he, before the farmhouse—I saw him dancing and snapping his fingers, explaining some Spanish dance to the farm hands. They looked upon this townsman, spending his summer vacation with them, as a "great card." He had spent his younger days partly in Chile, in the nitrate business, partly in the Argentine, and lived a deal in the past. He was now giving them an exhibition of some Spanish dance; and presently he began to sing, in response to some request from the stableboy, a Spanish song.

My mother came out, and looked at him sadly. I was old enough to see both

sides—to see that, in one way, my dad was making a motley of himself for these boys. But, at the same time, he was having what, out West, we would call "a good time." He was enjoying his summer vacation.

The trouble was that it was Sunday; and my mother thought he had been better employed singing a psalm to the boys—and he knew that she thought that when, looking across the stable yard, he caught her eyes. Result: he sniffed twice, blew his nose loudly, and retired quite inside the stable, where the boys followed—and sang, a little more quietly, another Spanish song a little more extravagant. Also my mother wept just two tears, and no more, and retired to the garden seat with the New Testament.

That Sunday was to me a long, long day; for, on the Monday, I expected to have news of the scholarship, and I hoped, most ardently, that I had not won. But Monday was a long day, too—because news did not come.

I know nothing in life worse than *waiting*. To act is good; to rest is good; to loaf is good. But to wait, to wait is horrible, undermining, breaking down.

The post box, for the old country, was, in the Isle of Arran, quite primitive. We might have been in the last ranch of the West so far as the post box went—for it was just an old mustard box covered with zinc on which the Highland rain played tip-tap between blinks of sun, an old mustard box on top of a stake driven into a bank at the roadside, just where the cart track to the farm debouched from the fine road that runs round the island.

My father walked down with me on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—walked down eager and impatient. He had his own mail to expect, of course, but I know he was eager about that letter for me.

Even on Wednesday it did not come. He had, however, a large mail of his own, and among it some newspapers. He slipped his letters into his inside pocket to read afterward, and, with his walking stick under his left arm, opened a newspaper, held it wide, scanned the

pages, frowned under his hanging brows, puffed his mustache, pouted, and bent his head. I thought some speculation had gone agee; but no—he handed me the paper and pointed.

The newspapers had received the list of prize winners before the letter announcing my place had come to me. Yes—I had won a scholarship. My name looked out on me, in print, from among the twenty, under the heading.

Result of the ——— School Bursary Examination.

My father said not a word—just tapped my shoulder twice lightly with his walking stick, then put the stick back under his arm, folded his hands behind his back, and walked uphill, looking at the pieces of macadamized rock glittering in the road.

"You see," said he at length, after a long pause, "your mother had hoped that Jack would go in for some profession at home."

Jack was my elder brother, and he had gone to the Panama Canal first of all, then left the canal to embark in the rubber business in Guatemala, then left that and gone to Venezuela, where he was now, according to his letters, managing a horse ranch. Spanish was a language my mother looked upon with regret, for Spanish had carried my brother to all these places.

"Well," said I to my father, "I would rather be in Jack's place than in a university."

Up we trudged a few yards more, and my father merely sniffed.

"Yes," he said at last; "yes, I quite understand. Well—well—you may learn engineering eventually. And engineering needs education. And engineering can take a man to the ends of the earth if he wants to go."

Of course, I jumped at that idea—anywhere, anywhere out of the world of crowds!

Up we came to the farm, and my father handed over the mail that had come for my mother.

"Has Will had no letter?" asked my mother, as she took the bundle.

My father smiled, and shook his head.

Then he prepared to give her a surprise with the newspaper, sniff-sniffing and glancing at it to get his finger on the place to spring it on her. She liked what she called "pleasant surprises," and he liked to pleasant-surprise her.

She opened a certain letter first, curious, womanlike, because she did not know the handwriting.

"I don't know this writing," she said, turning it over and over.

"Well, bless my heart, my dear, why not open it?" said my father. "Eh? What?" and sniffed, and got his finger to the list of bursary winners.

My mother opened the letter, and one in her handwriting dropped out. She let it fall, looking puzzled—and there it lay, for her strained face held our gaze. She read the letter, let it fall, sat down on the seat before the door, and stared into vacancy. My father cried out:

"What? What? What? Not that! Not that! Not that!"

He had an intuitive sense, or quickness of perception, of the kind called Celtic. He lifted the letter and read it. But he had little need to do so. He had known, looking on my mother, that it was to tell of the death of my elder brother, and his jaw went tight. Slowly, stiffly, his head rose, and he looked up at the sky, and, in a voice I shall never forget, he said:

"O God! And he was a man! He was a man! I shall never forgive you—God!"

"O John! John! Come to me!" cried my mother. "John!"—my father's name. "Take care, John!"

But my father was walking to and fro in the yard at a quick step, as if on a quarter-deck. He walked to the gate that led to the road downhill; he walked to the gate that led to the moors; to and fro, to and fro.

The people who owned the farm-steading came to peep and look. In a near field the farmer stood, rake upheld, transfixed, watching that march. From the door of the farm the old mother peeped. At the stable door there were faces. It was terrible. My father walked to and fro with his jaws locked and grim, and his hands clenched. My

mother ran after him, clutching his shoulder, and saying:

"John! John! Let your wife console you!"

He turned once or twice in his walk, and looked at her, but with no expression save a kind of puzzled one, as if he thought: "Who is this? Why does she hang on my steps?"

Once I thought he was going to strike her, and leaped forward to intercept; but it was only a gesture of dismissing her that he had made; and as I leaped forward he looked at me, and his eyes were so blank—looking at me as if I were a stock or stone—that I gave a choking blub in my chest.

Suddenly my father cried out:

"And he was a man, O God! He was a man!" and raised his fist to the heaven—and fell down in the yard.

It is too painful for me to tell the rest; but the end of my father was that he was led away from that farm where we had come on summer vacation, taken away like a little child, led by the hand of a man who had come from — Asylum for him.

Having gone in for the scholarship, and won it, I now continued my studies, still in Glasgow. Home was very subdued and sad. A great gloom hung over it, in which my poor mother moved like a withered leaf. I noticed, when I accompanied her to church—which I always now did, never inventing excuses for staying at home, as had been my wont of old—that a new petition had come into the parson's prayer: ". . . and for those whose minds have been blinded, we pray for light."

I think if I had looked into my heart during these months I should have been by way of flattering myself that I was an ideal son. Indeed, I think at times I did so look and see myself upon the stage of life as something of a heroic figure. Youth is histrionic.

Sheep farming was over; in another month I would be sitting for a fresh examination; if I came out near the top a bursary would be mine again, carrying me on from the grammar school to our university; if I came out a little lower I would have at least a scholarship. I

was already looked upon by my classmates as distinctly in the running; and yet a university career was the last thing that my heart desired.

When I passed westward by Kelvin-side, and saw the towers of the university against the sunset, they interested me well enough to carry the vision of them home in my mind, so that I might make an impression of them in red chalk. From the exterior there was something airy, romantic, about these towers. After seeing them one evening, as I walked home, many raucous voices of a Salvation Army choir fell harshly on my ears, the discords of cornet and tambourine, with the words, "Far, far away, like bells at sunset pealing," and I wanted to take the choristers up to the end of Charing Cross, and ask them to look on these towers as they dissolved in the mists of night—so that they might understand something of the beauty of the words they sang.

When I passed down University Gardens late one night from visiting a friend there, sudden, oyer me, there was a boom; the half hour had sounded. And I stood stock-still in that broad, deserted thoroughfare, and listened to the waves of sound trembling into distance. That experience made me think of a meteoric stone fallen in the velvet purple of some lake, and sending a circle of waves to the surrounding shores. As the words of the singers conjured up the misted towers, fading out so beautifully as to make me annoyed at their insulting discords, so the boom of the bell conjured up a picture. The art of words is not my forte; but I consider, thinking thus, how all the arts are one. To all this I have been led by speaking of the exterior of the University of Glasgow.

As for the interior; it had for me no attraction, and yet I was about to sit in an examination in a grand endeavor to achieve that for which I had no desire. So I saw myself, if not a "greenery yellowy, oh, such a good young man," as—in the phrase of old women—a "good son." Yes—there is no doubt that youth is histrionic.

You will readily understand that a

young man of such caliber as this had his calf love; and if the lady smiled, at times, a little on the sardonic side, I do not know that the young man was any the worse. He is the last, at the time, to perceive the sardonic dimples at the edges of his idol's mouth. He will see to it that she remains for him the Holy Grail, the Light that never was on land or sea. She has her amusement, he his ideal; and I think these things are well.

I think women like things to be a little secretive; an apple, if it be but a crab apple, is preferable to the luscious pear. Really, I do not think, looking back on that idyl from the sanity of middle age, that the secrecy of our meetings was essential; but I do know, whatever the cause, My Lady, with very solemn eyes, suggested to me the advisability of not calling too frequently at her home. I remember that, at the time, I used to marvel much how fate cast us together, how frequently we, as it were, bumped into one another, and I used to take it as a sign that fate smiled upon us.

But, looking back now, I remember that when I bumped into her—let me say at Queen Street Station—at two of a Saturday afternoon, she really had dropped, in conversation the preceding Monday, that she expected to be in town on Saturday afternoon. When I had made up my mind to visit the Institute of Fine Arts upon a Thursday evening, changed my mind and decided to go upon Friday, I think it quite probable that I really remembered the fact—before the changing of my mind, and not after—the fact that she had said that she intended to go to see the pictures at the Fine Arts Institute on Friday evening because the band played on that night.

On so much of my calf love, then, do I look back with smiling tolerance; no—I think I should say with approval, for he who worships a goddess in spirit and in truth is not likely to slide too often from his chair beneath the table at a smoking concert; and, though no Puritan, I have observed that a Spartan menu is conducive to a healthy body,

and a healthy body is the fit home for a healthy mind.

A celebrated Scot has said that the Scotsman without religion is apt to drop into the public house. An irreligious young man, I would add, with no blasphemy, but a knowledge of mankind and romantic views, can make out of a West End young lady, with bowed lips and russet locks, a divinity as effectual as a stone virgin between wax candles. Still, your divinity must have her whims, and not all her whims can shatter her in the eyes of her worshiper. I really don't think that the secrecy was good; but that is a detail. As luck would have it—I remember how, in the agony of the time, I thought some hideous fate stepped in upon our family ever. As luck would have it, out of my romance came tragedy.

Thrice I had conveyed My Lady to her door, and, by her request, parted from her behind some trees that overlooked her father's house. I suspect there was nothing more in it than the chaffing of her brothers; certainly they used to cock an eye in a roguish way upon me at times, and I fancy indeed that we were looked upon as something of a joke. My Lady would have it, at any rate, that I remain in the shadow of the rhododendrons until she had rung, and till the flood of light upon the gravel had announced the opening of the door, its extinguishment the closing. I was to count ten—or something of that kind—and then depart.

This kind of parody of Romeo I can quite understand is titillating to a young lady who owns a ticket at the circulating library, but there are many types of minds in the world, and while some deck the sinister with the romantic, others see in the romantic the sinister. One such had spied upon me; and on the third, or perhaps fourth, occasion of this secretive departure, just as I was turning away, he laid hold of me—a perfect type of dirty-scarfed, greasy-capped lurcher.

"Half a minute, young man," said he. "I've been watching you."

"Well?" said I.

"What's it worth?" said he.

"What do you mean?" said I.

"Why," said he, "your little game. I'll keep my mouth shut for a quid."

My "dander" was by no means up; there was a trifle of almost amusement in my mind.

"If you don't give me a quid," he said, "I'll step right out and tell the gentleman that you've been trying to get round about his daughter."

Of course, as the saying is, I saw red at that, and hit out; and there we fell to—he, with his hooligan methods to aid in the victory, I with the intense madness at the sullying of my idol. I write with a certain air of levity of these incidents. I do so because there is no other way. When I think of the sequel of it all, it seems a very silly play.

At last I landed him a blow that not only laid him flat upon the ground, but kept him there.

I was blown, my heart going like a piston, the sweat was cold on me suddenly in the autumn night. I looked at my antagonist again. The horrible, pallid light of an arc lamp at the corner sifted through the hanging boughs of a lime tree, and glistened on his teeth. My heart, that had been going like a piston, seemed to clutch, and clutch, and clutch; an immense panic fell on me. I bent down and felt his heart, and could find no beating.

I remember the torture of the moment, how I was maddened with annoyance at myself because all I could feel was the throb, throbbing of the blood in my own hand. I almost wept. I put my ear to his breast, and what I heard was like the echo of my own heart throbs in my ear. I could hear nothing outside of my terror.

I stood up, and said to myself over and over again: "Be calm! Be calm—be calm!" I held my hands rigid; I pressed my lips together; I went over the alphabet, all in a mad endeavor to collect myself. So I gained some measure of calm, at least enough to hold his wrist again, not with my thumb—remembering that there is a pulse in the thumb; but there was no pulse of life in his wrist.

You can conceive my panic. No time

now for histrionics. As quick as a knife thrust I saw the gallows, my mother's agony—her death with a broken heart—already nigh enough broken by the tragedy of my father's madness. I walked home. I wanted to run home; but I controlled myself. I walked home.

My mother had gone to bed. I sat all night in my room. It is a wonder I did not go gray, as I have heard men may in a night. Time after time I was possessed of a desire to go out and run, run, run. Where? I would ask myself. And there I sat all night reasoning myself into a course of wise action. Wise action! It was the biggest blunder I ever made in my life.

I appeared at breakfast. My mother remarked upon my haggard looks. I made some excuse—I know not what—of neuralgia, of neuralgic pain, of a chill. I have had some moments of suspense in my life. I have had some times of anguish. But they concern myself only, or those who are not my blood kin. I wanted to tell her all; and anon I dared not. I wanted to bid her farewell—and could not. I made my morning's farewell overcold instead of overtender—I left the house, I made haste to my bank and drew my little all, and thence to a shipping office.

I saw a clerk who cannot, I suspect, have been a youth of much penetration; for, though I schooled myself, I can hardly think that my face was free of signs of anxiety. I told him some airy tale of wishing to get the first possible boat for America. There was one in a fortnight. When I said, in as nonchalant a voice as I could muster: "Oh—that is some time, and my business demands haste," with a "Just a moment," he withdrew to the side of an elderly man at a rearward desk, an elderly man who had that air as of being ready to jump into the breach at a moment's notice, which I, observing, took for a sign that his suspicion was aroused.

Nothing of the sort, of course; he was only eager to book a passage. He came over to me at once, and, echoing the "Just a moment" of the younger assistant, departed into a partitioned-off

room at the end of the office. Through the dulled glass I saw him take a receiver from the rests of a telephone. I made a turn on my heel to run for the door, sure that he was ringing up Duke Street, and then I gripped myself. I was going to see it through.

He returned—after about a hundred years—to tell me that that evening I could sail from Liverpool; there was just one berth, second class, if that would suit.

There is no pummeling worse than that of a guilty conscience. I leave it to the reader to imagine, upon these lines, the pummeling of the ensuing days, and these last, and horrific, pummelings on the coming alongside of the doctor's launch, on the coming alongside of the pilot boat, on the coming aboard of the customs' men; on the descent of the gangway.

That, then, is how I left home.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE RAILWAY.

I find that others have felt, as I first felt on going West, "there is nothing here but the railway." The feeling is, of course, absurd. But it is very comprehensible. For mile after mile there is nothing to be seen but the wilderness. The sagebrush lands, after the East is passed, roll everlasting north and south.

I sat looking out at them, and, instead of feeling more lonely and miserable, I felt more at peace. For these spaces asked me, as it were, to live up to them, to put something in myself that they possessed. So, instead of the sagebrush lands depressing me, they made me adopt this outlook. I did not wish to weep for tangles and misunderstandings in the little isle back there across the Atlantic. The accepting mood was stronger. Very good—if that be fate, let me bear it. It was only the mountains that depressed me.

As the train entered these cañons of the West, where there seems hardly room for aught but the rivers that foam through them—though engineers have

found a way—I felt again the fatuity of much of life. Restrictions and constrictions seemed a great part of life; also misunderstandings.

The train screamed on through the mountains; hummed, on a hollow note, across trestles; roared through cañons; and I was glad when we emerged at last, mounting upward, at Black Kettle, which I had selected, looking on the great map in the railroad booking hall back East, because its name appealed to me, in the center of a string of appealing names—thus: Placer, Antelope Springs, Adobe, Black Kettle, Lone Tree, Fort Lincoln, Montezuma. But by the time that we reached Black Kettle I had quite decided that there was nothing for me to do in that country but to help to keep the railway in repair!

Take Black Kettle, for example: It consisted of seven houses—one hotel, one store, one boarding house, four residential houses with their vegetable patches. The inhabitants were the hotel proprietor, the storekeeper, the storekeeper's wife, the bartender, the Chinese cook, four section men, including the section boss, and a telegraph operator, who was also station agent.

Everybody was very decent to me when I went in. The hotel proprietor offered me a free drink before I had booked a room; the telegraph operator—a thin, wiry little Scotsman with a thin, wiry mustache, stained with tobacco juice—introduced himself to me when, after a wash, I came out again and walked on the deserted balcony, introduced himself, and begged me to come and drink with him all in one breath.

The storekeeper, when I stepped over past his door, and caught his eye, gave me a nod, and said "How-do!" abruptly, but friendly enough; he looked an abrupt man, a philosophic, dry old stick, very like pictures of Uncle Sam.

The section men, when they came over to the hotel in the evening, stood near me, as if to give me a chance to talk, if I wished to; and, when I did not speak, as I had read that in the West attempts at making acquaintance quickly are sometimes resented, their

boss said: "Perhaps the gentleman setting there would care for a game?"

I turned my head.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "Kind of lonesome for a stranger in this town. Would you care for a game of checkers?"

And so I played a game of draughts with the boss on the first evening in Black Kettle. He was a Michigan man, all bones and joints and elasticity, with a great foot for a double shuffle, a nose like a door handle, chunks of cheek bones, a thin, determined, bony chin, and glittering eyes.

I have spoken of getting used to the strange surroundings. The surroundings were—across the railway track—green and silver benches—because of their grass and sand—going up, up, up in rolls, as if they were for giants to sit on and watch some play going on in Black Kettle. These benches fascinated me. The immense sweep of them, and the way white clouds would look up away beyond the last one, and not as if just behind the last, as if, rather, there was immensity between them and that last roll of hill, charmed me.

To lie on the veranda of the Palace Hotel of Black Kettle and watch the clouds go up behind the benches, all to the sound of grasshoppers chirring, seemed all that one could do in Black Kettle. If one had not to work to live, I think it all that one would desire to do also.

I am no hobo, but I love to lie on the Palace veranda and listen to the silence. So do all men who visit Black Kettle. And to see a cow-puncher with his back to the wall and his legs stretched half across the veranda there, while his horse waits for him with drooping head, almost too lazy-looking to flick the flies, is to see a picture not easily forgotten.

But, as luck would have it, no cow-puncher was there to suggest, when I arrived, by his presence, that there were homes and work back from the track. Black Kettle was all alone, with its handful of people, for three weeks. The sitting room of the Palace, inhabited by a dull suite of furniture, the barroom inhabited by stolid casks, a few small

tables with vacant chairs beside them, a white-faced nickel-in-the-slot hurdy-gurdy, and a large spittoon, plunged me in terror. The bartender sometimes woke in that desolation, the proprietor sometimes coughed in the kitchen. Ah Sing sometimes sang, among his pots, in a high, thin, plaintive voice. I made up my mind that there was no room for another bartender, even had I cared for the job, or been considered capable. I also made up my mind that there was no scope for another hotel, even if I had the money to start one.

So, as the third week drew near an end, sick of doing nothing but worrying on the veranda, I approached the section-gang boss, and asked him if he knew of any work to be had in the vicinity.

He looked at me sidewise.

"What kind of job?" he asked. "Anything to do for the time being?"

"Anything at all," I said.

"Well, there's an extra gang coming to work up there—seven miles up the line. I reckon I could say a word for you to the boss. He'll be coming up with some men on the passenger train to-night."

The train was not due for an hour, but the inhabitants were already arranging themselves in picturesque, open-shirted attitudes, on the platform. By "inhabitants" I mean the three section men, hands in pockets—one standing, leaning against the wall of the little station house; one sitting, leaning against it and nursing one knee, the other leg thrust out; one sitting on a truck; the telegraph operator inside his room, with his shoulder against the jamb, his hands in pockets, his neck stretching out ever and again as he spat across the platform onto the track.

When we appeared he spat and said: "How goes it?" and the section boss replied: "Well, how are you making out?"

The three section men looked stolid; silence fell.

Then the operator spat again, and said: "I was just telling the boys of when I was running one of the stations in Colombia for a gold-mining company there," and he plunged into a story about

yellow fever, and how he kept the men all working, and how they dropped "like flies, gents; yes, sir, like flies!" and all the while his instrument behind him was giving little jerky "tick-ticks," as if some drowsy old woman napped over her knitting within.

Then the booming whistle of the approaching train sounded. The track began to sing. The engine shrieked, rounded the curve, and the "passenger" ran into the depot with a whirl of dust and an odor of oil and hot iron. The conductor and one man alighted. A tin box shot out of one of the cars; the conductor called "All aboard!" and then, as the train moved on again, he stood, holding out a hand to catch a rail, foot slightly raised, ready to step on when the end of a car wou'd come level, and ——"How-do, gents!" he hailed. "How's things up here? On the boom?" laughed, stepped aboard, waved his hand, and the train slid out, and we sat looking at the tail light dwindling—then looked at the man who stood on the platform in the dusk.

I saw him loom big and heavy, and withal easy, despite his avoirdupois. The section boss advanced on him, he on the section boss, and they pump-handled each other cordially and stood chatting.

The operator said "Oh, well!" and slipped into his room, and presently a slab of light fell from his door across the platform, and the sound of his instrument broke out. A little chill fell, and the scent of sagebrush blessed the night.

"Cold," said one of the section men, rose, and drifted away with slow, heavy steps.

"Aye, aye!" said section man number two and rose.

"Um!" said section man number three, and came erect from leaning against the wall. They followed their mate.

"Come here, sir! I want to introduce you. I've been telling the boss—this is Alf Douglas, boss of the extra gang coming up here; I don't know your name, sir?"

"Eh—er—Williams," I said. Why

"Williams" don't ask me. It was the first that came to my mind, and so Williams I would be for the future, at least till I had an English paper and had my mind relieved. "John Williams," I said next. Why "John" don't ask me, either.

"How do, sir?" said the boss. "Englishman?"

"How do you do?" I said. "No, I'm from—"

"Oh, a Scotsman," he broke in. "That's better. Well, Mr. Dunnage, he told me you want a job. You want it badly?"

"Yes," I said.

"Um!" he said, and shook his head. "The trouble is that I've got only a gang of dagos to work for me, and I never heard of a white man working with dagos before. The money's all right, two and a half, just as if they were white, but maybe you wouldn't care to tackle that—even temporary, till the white gang comes up?"

"There is a white gang?" I asked.

We were standing near the operator's door, and the light showed Douglas' face. I thought he gave a quick, keener look at me, as if thinking I was none so eager for work after all, and we in the old country are told to look eager in the States!

"In about a month," he said.

"Good!" I said. "I can work in the dago gang till then."

I saw that they both felt a little bad about it, then, as if they liked me for taking the job on, but felt some remorse for having nothing better to offer me. Still—I had to work, and, as I have explained, being green to the country, there seemed to me to be no other work in the country but railway work. The place looked, to my new eyes, wholly a void—with the railway running through it.

But things were not so bad as I had prepared to find them at the Gravel Pit. Black Kettle lay seven miles away, and to my imagination the place was quite cut off from the world!

The passage of occasional freight trains served but to emphasize the loneliness of the country; for, after they had gone screaming past, even before the

dust swirls by the trackside had settled, the silence came again.

Facing a great hill, a little west of the pit, a steam shovel had been set. That steam shovel, in its own little siding, all covered with tarpaulins, seemed a melancholy sight. I could hardly believe that white men would be coming anon to get steam up in it, and set it nozing and scooping into the hill. It wore the air of having been left there for the Spirit of the Dry Belt to cover over with sand, and blot out, and forget.

The camp consisted of two old freight cars, one used for a storehouse and dining room and kitchen and sleeping room for a Chinaman; the other used for a bunk house for the men, with bunks fitted up inside it, and just the end partitioned off as a boss' room. In the boss' room were two bunks, and one of them he told me I could occupy.

"I can't see a white man sleeping with these dagos," he said.

It was very good of him, and I appreciated it very deeply. That was the only difference made between me and the gang: I slept in the cut-off apartment with the boss, but at work I was treated just as a unit of the gang. When Douglas chose to be abusive he was abusive to us all; his curses rang in my ears as sharply as in the ears of his "Eyetalians."

Our work was to undermine the hill along the railway track, with pick, shovel, and dynamite, preparing a path for the steam shovel. Here was new work indeed for me; but what made it trying was the attitude of the "Eyetalians." They resented my presence; and I went upon the principle of ignoring their resentment. If a man working above me let a boulder plunge down on me without any shout of warning, I slipped aside, as if it was all in the day's work, never so much as looked up—and went on working.

I acted also upon the principle of showing, as well as no resentment, a good example. If I was working above an Italian, and loosened a boulder I would shout: "Look out!"—or "Look up!" when I found that "Look up!"

takes the place of "Look out!" in the West. In a way it was a mistake. These Italians seemed mostly of the order of humanity that requests and begs to be browbeaten.

Douglas' wild language, and the way he had of raising a clenched fist after a command, accelerating the gang's movements, he had learned, doubtless, just as I was learning. I sometimes saw his eye on me after such episodes as I tell of, when a boulder rolled toward me without warning and I merely dodged—saw his eye on me, and at first wondered if he thought I was not agile enough; saw his eye on me when I shouted: "Look up!"—thoughtful, watchful, considering. He seemed to say: "He'll learn!" That was what eventually his glance seemed always to imply when he looked on such scenes.

I did learn, too.

At the end of the first week the boss called to me and one of the Italians, and told us to lift a log that lay by the railway track, and throw it down the farther side of the embankment.

I stooped to lift one end; the Italian stooped to the other. I lifted the log to my right shoulder; but the Italian, who was a left-handed man, lifted by the left and eased his end onto his left shoulder. Thus we were back to back, and when I started off in a slow step, never thinking of left-handed men, I headed one way, and he the other way; thus he fell backward. I felt the jar, and, looking round smartly, saw him also looking round, off his balance.

Instead of trying to hold the log—though, just at that, he regained his balance, with legs sprawled like a slack pair of compasses—he flung it from him. My shoulder and collar bone received a pretty jar, for I—still unlike the "dago push," as they were called by the Black Kettle section gang—was bent upon, as I would say, being "decent," and was clutching the log to save the Italian. Down went his end thud, and he called me what no man may call another in earnest.

My blood boiled. I wanted, in one stammering speech, to explain to this dago what I thought of him—and his

gang. I wanted to tell him that I had tried to help him when I saw what he had done, to tell him that he and his fellows deliberately rolled bowlders upon me without warning, that I always warned, that—every single item of that strained week. Instead, at that oath, and seeing the dago come for me, I simply saw nothing but his ugly face, and determined to pound it. I made three swift steps to meet him. I had no intention to stand him off. If he thought he could advance on me and I do the standing off, he was all out of his reckoning. I went to meet him mightily rejoicing.

He paused, then, and made a grab for a pinch bar, snatched it up, and rushed afresh on me. There flashed into my head a yarn told by the operator at Black Kettle that ended: "Fists are all very good, but in a brown gang of any kind a white man is going to have no show with his fists. If he ain't got a gun let him take the edge of a shovel." So, when the whole gang dropped their tools, and came plunging on me, I grabbed a shovel and rushed at them. I was glad they all came on me. That one was not nearly enough. I would have knocked Italy off the map of Europe at the moment!

They simply parted feebly at that, made abortive swipes at me, and circled wide. My man even dropped his pinch bar, so I dropped the shovel, and smashed him with my fist. There was a thud of feet in the sand, a bellow of oaths, and I was caught by the shoulders and sent flying.

"Come on! The lot of ye! Get a move on!" And Douglas, having flung me from my enemy, shot past us to the gang, routing them back to work.

I stood up and looked on the scene. The "Eyetalian" rose, with bleeding nose, and held out his hand.

"All right," he said. "We shake hand. Everyt'ing all right."

And he meant it—as you shall hear. I took his hand, and we shook.

"Come on! Come on! Get a move on!" came Douglas' voice.

We went back to our log. The "Eyetalian" lifted by the right this time, and

was very careful, when we had carried the log across the track, to lower from the shoulder to the carry in unison with me, even said "Ready?" waited for my "Right!" and then we flung the great log over.

He was then my very good friend, and kept repeating, as we clambered up to the gang: "All right. Everyt'ing all right. Ver' good."

But there was a man, Pietro, in the gang, for whom I had, as the West says, "no use." And, as luck would have it, I was sent off in his company to bring up a push-car load of cordwood that had been thrown from a train for the camp, but thrown off beside the steam shovel, a quarter of a mile away.

"Here, Williams—and you, Pietro—you gó down and get the push car on the track, and fetch up a load of cordwood from down at the steam shovel."

Pietro gave me a malevolent look, and Douglas, I noticed, smiled. We placed the wheels on the trail and the push car atop, and trotted off behind the car along the track. Just round the bend a grade begins, and the car required no pushing, but, instead, had to be kept hold of by the handles. A little farther on was the trestle bridge, built, as you know these bridges are, quite open, so that any one going over has to step from tie to tie, and can look clear down to the bottom of the gorge below.

Suddenly, as we came near the bridge, and were hidden from the gang by the bend, Pietro said: "Why you not run?" and began to speed the car toward the bridge. "Run! Can you no' run?"

"Take care of the bridge," I said.

"You scared!" he cried, and leaned on the car, and sent it fiercely before him. I gave but one glance, and then saw his game. He was getting ready to leap to a sitting position on the car when we should gain the bridge. I noticed his left shoulder—he running on my right—edging toward me.

What I expected happened.

Suddenly he leaped, intending to spin round and sit on the car, at the same time intending to jolt me with his left shoulder. Just as he leaped I dodged—

with the result that he did not cannon off me onto the car, but fell between me and it. I hung onto the car, and yanked it to a standstill, and waited for him to rise. He scrambled to his feet, muttering, with his eyes glinting on me.

"You missed it," I said.

"Yes, I miss," he said, and took hold again, and we trotted on afresh. Now came my turn.

"Run," said I, and, full tilt, I started for the bridge, which was just about a score of ties distant.

I like nothing better than taking his own weapons to a man who is determined to prove himself a menial person. He gripped tight to his handle, and fell into step. I put on every ounce of pressure I had in my body. I stretched my body, too, and my arms, so that I could see the ties before coming to them, and thus not lose a step; for I knew that we were almost on the bridge. Then we were on it! And I was glad that I had stretched out so—for our speed was now so great that I could hardly keep up with the push car; and the ties, and the depth of the gulch between them, made, together, just a blur below me.

"Run!" I cried.

He simply caught right hold of the car, and hung on. Suddenly he slipped. But I was ready for that, to grasp him if he showed signs of falling between the ties. No! He was too fond of life. He clung to the car, and to life, so tenaciously that he made a drag on the car as, with his body stretched out, his toes caught, caught, caught on the edges of the ties. He had almost stopped the car by the time we gained the opposite bank. There he scrambled to his feet. And now I had my eye on him.

"What you do?" he said.

"What you tried to do to me," I said. "And don't try again."

We trudged on thoughtfully to the cordwood pile. He was silent; but, as you can surmise, the air was full of trouble. It broke at the cordwood pile.

"You block that wheel to keep car from running down!" he ordered.

At first I resented the order—you see by now what kind of kid I was, and will understand me doing so. I thought to

tell him to do the blocking himself, but quickly argued: "What's the sense? I don't want to dominate him. I only want fair play," so I blocked the wheel, with a billet of wood from the side of the track, and, as I rose from doing so I saw a shadow leaping along the ground —gave a jump sidewise to keep whatever caused it from falling on me, and smack came a billet down on the car end just where I had stood.

I had been far too patient with him. I should—as I expect you have already thought—have made him block that wheel. However—he had got so much rope that he was eager to hang himself.

"Oh!" he said. "I not see you—I begin to load car."

"If you are going to load the car like that," I said, "you'll have to do it yourself," and I stood back.

"I not notice where you stand," said he.

I was pondering exactly what to do. Again I made a mistake. I did what is called "leaving it at that"; I walked over to the cordwood pile, and began loading the car. When I was at the car he would be at the pile—when I was at the pile he was at the car. So we came and went.

Then, just as I was putting on what looked as if it would have to be the last billet, he yelled: "Look up!" and flung a billet, from where he stood, right to the top of the load, with the result that it all came rattling down to both ends of the car. More intent on saving the work of reloading than in attending to Pietro, I leaped to an end, and thrust up the pile there, balancing it. Pietro stood watching me, grinning. Then he pointed to some billets that had rolled quite off at the other end.

"Lift these—too many!" he said.

Well—that was quite enough. He had coaxed the fight out of me in earnest, and I lifted a billet, as he ordered—but sent it bang at his head, and followed it up with myself. I had never learned to box; but that which followed was hardly a boxing contest. I assure you that before we were through I was battered black and blue, and yet I felt not one single blow, knew no pain, until

afterward. All that I knew was that every now and then I got a smash in at Pietro, keeping my eyes on his all the time.

The most terrible thing to remember is when I found myself on the top of him, after he had fallen, and with my hands on his windpipe. It was his eyes, protruding, that brought me to myself, horrified.

I cannot tell you the relief I felt when he lurched to his legs and staggered to the car, kicked aside the billets that blocked the wheels, and began to strain against the car to set it in motion.

I walked over and leaned to the task with him, and so, both bleeding and bruised, we urged the car back to camp. When we gained the other bank, beyond the trestle, I stopped and held out my hand.

"All right?" I asked.

He looked at my hand. He half extended his. Then—"No!" he said, and swore in Italian.

"Oh, all right," I said, and we pushed on, rounded the bend, and came back to where the gang worked on the gravel slope.

Douglas stood by the trackside, the gang toiled up on the hill face. As we passed Douglas I squinted up at him, where I bent pushing the load, and he looked round hastily, was just going to look away again—and then he saw our faces, wheeled about, looked at Pietro—at me—back again—then chuckled to himself. That was all. But the incident was not closed.

When we had unloaded beside the cook's car, and lifted the push car off the wheels, and the wheels off the track, we returned to the gang, and clambered to our places on the hill. Immediately Pietro began to talk wildly in Italian, while using his pick. But he became so excited anon that he ceased to wield the pick.

"Pietro, you so-and-so," came Douglas' voice, "I've got my eye on you!"

Pietro cursed under his breath, but either wonderful is the carrying capacity of atmosphere in the Dry Belt, or else wonderfully accurate was Douglas' knowledge of his man.

"Don't curse at me!" came Douglas' voice.

Pietro picked on, and quietly his mates discharged questions at him. As I picked into the hill around a boulder I saw their eyes glinting toward me.

Pietro began again; and one or two of the gang now grew so excited that they ceased to work, too. Douglas' voice bellowed, and they fell to work again.

We were now confronted with rock. "Is that rock?" hailed Douglas.

"Yes!" we shouted down.

"All right!" and he clambered up to us, and the two men who did the blasting as a rule fell to work making the holes for the charge.

I don't know how it befell—for Douglas generally erred on the safe side and drew us off far farther than seemed necessary when a blast was made; indeed, I have heard the men laugh at his care over them, and they have looked at him so insolently when he ordered them to go well back, that he has had, as the phrase is, to put the screw on extra tight afterward—I don't know how it befell, but this time he neither ordered us off, nor went off himself.

Always, I must say, he stood far nearer than he allowed any man to stand when a charge was made. I grew to admire Douglas immensely, and I want to note that fact about him. However, this time he seemed hardly thinking about the detonation; stood just at the foot of the hill, and we twenty yards along the grade.

"Boom!" and up went a cascade of dirt and rocks.

It was so vigorous that we raised our shovels, and held them over our heads to shield us from the falling shower of dirt and stones.

Suddenly we saw that Douglas had been hit. A chunk of rock had smashed his head. I ran to him at once, and bent over him. The gang followed.

"He hurt bad?" asked one.

"My God!" I cried. "Look!"

His head was gashed frightfully.

"He dead!" cried Pietro. "He dead!"

And then he gave a screech—there is no other word for it—and leaped on me.

I slipped aside, but they seemed all to be upon me, these dagos; and wildly I clutched a shovel and whirled round with my back to the hill.

And then that left-handed man with whom I had had the altercation showed his genuineness. He gave a kind of scream.

"Ver' good! Everyt'ing all right! I stick to you!" and he snatched a shovel and stood beside me, and poured forth a cascade of voluble Italian on the gang.

A showman in a cage of wild cats must feel somewhat as we felt then. They rushed on me, and I brought down the shovel on a pate, felt my legs wabbly with fear, and my heart big with determination all at one time; swung the shovel round and smashed again, standing away from my one friend so as not to hit him.

And then there came a whoop and a slither of stones, and the gang fell back, and I, too, stepped back, and gave a quick look uphill in the direction of their gaze. And, coming down the incline, with forefeet taut in the sliding soil, hind legs bent, sliding down in the wonderful way that they have the knack of, came a white, Western cayuse, with a big, broad-chested man upon its back, he balancing exquisitely like the god Apollo to my eye.

But there was nothing of ancient Greece in his weapon. His left hand lightly held the reins, his right was raised in air, holding a long-nosed Colt, raised with the elbow toward us, and the wrist backward, ready to slam down forward, and aim, and fire, all in one quick gesture.

CHAPTER III.

THE COWBOY PHILOSOPHER.

Within one minute the "dago push" was in full flight round the bend, campward. Within the hour, with Douglas unconscious across the saddle, my splendid ally and I came into Black Kettle. The friendly dago, we suggested, should accompany us. But no—he said he would be all right with the gang, and so, as he spoke as one who knew, we did not urge him to come with us.

We came to Black Kettle, which clustered there, oblivious of all things, at the foot of the benches in the sunlight and sand. Looking round for sign of any inhabitants, I saw, on this occasion, what I had never noticed before—corrals to south of the track, in a fold of the benches; and, standing in the center of the little cluster of houses, upright in the sand, a couple of hitching posts with rings in their tops. Strange that I had not noticed them before. I suppose I had been so possessed of my half-panicky idea that there was nothing in the country but the railroad that these two signs simply whispered to me in vain—of ranches backward in the hills, and horsemen, sometimes at least, riding into town from somewhere.

A hail brought Scotty—the lean, tobacco-juice-attenuated operator—onto the platform, rubbing his eyes from sleep, and with disheveled hair, the ends of his sparse mustache, which he had a habit of chewing, draggling in his mouth. He simply called out an oath—in a way common to the place—at sight of our burden, and hastened, flurried and jerkily, to our aid, helped us to carry Douglas into the depot office, and lay him on the floor there, and then he rushed to his instrument to call up a doctor from Lone Tree. His tap-tapping over, he turned to consider Douglas, who now broke into pitiable moans.

"By —, Apache," said he. "It gives him hell! I think I'd rather be a stiff than like that."

"Oh, I don't know," said he who was called Apache, and raised and nodded his head in a determined fashion. I noticed then, for the first time, that he wore very tiny gold earrings. The light caught them as he moved his head so. "I'm not so sure about that. Life is not worth living for the man who can't get a move on things, for the man who is, as you might say, waiting—for a man with a mine two hundred miles beyond railhead, and he maybe sixty years old, and the railway not liable to extend for twenty years. He does not want a pompous funeral, and he is not going to eat and drink his gravestone. Waiting is hell when there is no show.

If you are five hundred dollars in debt to the hotel keeper, and your wages are only forty-five, it's hell waiting for that forty-five, especially if you want to buy a new undershirt and a pair of pants.

"It must be hell waiting in a cell for a hanging. But life's worth living when things are moving—Life's worth living for the prospector when the track-layers are moving a mile a day nearer his prospective mine, and he's only ætat fifty. If he was only twenty-one it would be futile, for he'd be broke again long before he was forty. Life's worth living if you owe your hotel proprietor last month's grub and bed—thirty dollars—and have a hundred dollars coming to you at end of the month. You'll be liable to celebrate paying him off," he added, "and go broke again. It's all right waiting even for the hangman in the condemned cell, if you've got a file up your sleeve. Yes, sir—and Jake Douglas is not so bad just now as you might think. He's putting up a fight, and you've wired for the doc. Life is not a bed of roses—and only a man who thinks it is, is going to go and say anything so damn futile. There's something to be said for pain, too, my friend. Pain will teach you how to grip your jaws together, and I never heard that a codfish-mouthed man was much use. Got any cigarettes?"

"No—don't make them," said Scotty. "I got a plug of chewing tobacco."

Apache shook his head. I took more stock of him now—this man who had come so appropriately to my aid and to the aid of the boss. He was a lithe, sunburned fellow, wearing open a loose jacket, beneath which was a black shirt with pearl buttons. Round his neck was a great cream-colored neckerchief that hung half down his back in a V shape. He wore heavy leathern "chaps." On his head was a round, soft hat, broad of brim. He was a picturesque figure, one to look at with interest, though he bore himself without swagger, and apparently made no attempt to attract attention.

He shook his head again.

"No use for an invalid," he said, "but Douglas is liable to want a smoke after

the doc's been along." He produced a bag of tobacco and cigarette papers, and squatted down cross-legged on the floor, and began to roll. "I can't stay on too long," said he. "I have an appointment."

Scotty looked out on the sunny square—I learned afterward that the patch of sand was called a square—and said absently: "Far away?"

"Not very far," said Apache. "See—I've rolled half a dozen, and pinched them firm. He's only got to lick them if he wants them. No, not very far."

There was a long pause.

"You working with Johnson up at his new ranch, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Kind of a gardening job for a man like you, ain't it?" This said a little tentatively.

"Well, there are sure some implements to handle."

"They tell me he ain't got no stock at all on the place—that he's one of these yere new gents that grows a rose tree in a dump of cinders."

"That's what they say," said Apache. "Maketh the desert to blossom with the rose."

"That's what they say!" grunted Scotty, still staring out, his back turned. "Don't you know yourself when you're aidin' him in his pursuits? If it wasn't a man like you I'd say you were both locoed to try and grow fruit up there."

"It's been done, all right," said Apache. "I've seen these blasted gardeners come in where you'd think the only profession bar cow-punching would be making lava ornaments—in a dryer country than this—just a day's ride more to hell, as they say—and"—he paused—"before three years were past there were these blasted gardeners coming down in wagons and telling the cattleman that his day was done, and——" he stopped short, aware of how he was maligning what had been given out as his occupation. At the same time Scotty turned slowly and surveyed him.

There they stood—the lean, little Scotsman, with his brows frowning, and a grin breaking on his mouth, looking

down on Apache Kid, making the drolllest, distorted face imaginable; Apache Kid looking up at him, his head a little on one side, his eyes dancing with merriment.

And then, in the chirring silence outside, we heard the rattle-rattle-rattle of a pump car abruptly break out and come smartly nearer.

I stepped out, and there, just whirling round the bend, were four men on a hand car, two going up and two going down, two up and two down, with a precipitancy that must have been something of a record.

A little later on in the day I was to see a hand car driven as swiftly, but I had never before seen such action. It thrilled me. There was something magnificent in the rising and falling bodies, two forward, two to rear, coming thus, rattling, on the jump, into quiet Black Kettle.

The first glimpse of the hand car and the men suggested some prehistoric beast, come awake in these sunny sand hills after a sleep of a million years, and cavorting down on the little depot.

Up and down went the bodies, and then the hand car rattled alongside the platform, one of the men snapped "Whoa!" and all four clung to the handles that had been going up and down for fourteen miles, and stopped their motion. But before the car stopped, one of the men, who had been pumping facing the direction in which the car was urged, stooped carefully, to avoid a hit on the head from the still rising and falling handles, lifted a little black bag and a jacket, and stepped neatly off to the platform. He was pouring with sweat. His white shirt clung to him, and showed a solid, square little chest. In his mouth he held, daintily with his teeth, a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses. This was "the doc."

He saw me, and said to me, setting down his bag with the jacket over it, and taking his eyeglasses from his mouth: "The goddam sweat blinds my goddam eyeglasses," in quite a cultured voice.

If Douglas had not given a moan at that moment, I think I might have

smiled. No wonder that these better women who do not lecture us on swearing do sometimes smile at us for the ridiculousness of our pet swears. I remember once telling a dry stick of a man, very excitedly, about a storm, and saying: "My mother tells me that she had a hell of a time in a storm off Cape Horn." He looked at me with a dry twinkle, and said: "Did the good lady really say so?"

The doc wiped his eyeglasses with a handkerchief, and fitted them upon his nose. He was a capable man, I thought; for, as he was thus employed, one of the men on the hand car was lifting onto the platform buckets of water which they had brought along with them. The doc stepped into the agent's room at the sound of Douglas' moan; and one of the men on the hand car, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, gave a little chuckling laugh.

"Doc would make a hell of a section boss," said he.

"Reckon we never got over a track like it before," said another.

"I never did," said the one who was lifting off the buckets of water. "He made me laugh, did doc, when the sweat got running on his glasses, and he took them off, and then couldn't catch hold of the pump handle again."

"He got his knuckles rapped with the handle, I suppose," said I.

The man turned and examined me, and evidently I bore his scrutiny well.

"No, sir," he said. "But we were going to slow up for him to catch hold, and he yelled out to us to pump on. 'I'll catch the goddam thing!' says he. He makes me smile—the English way he nips his cusses."

"He's all right," said another. "I see he knew his business when he shouts out: 'The water tank! Black Kettle ain't got water at the depot, has it?' and when we all says 'No'—'Good!' he says, and we appropriates all the five buckets in the freight shed, fills 'em full at the tank, and sets 'em round our feet. It seemed a hell of a lot to bring five full buckets—but it's five half ones now," and he nodded at the half-empty pails.

Apache Kid came out to the platform

abruptly, his sleeves rolled up, very alert, snatched up one of the buckets, and hastened back again to the agent's room. It struck me that I would be of assistance, and I stepped quickly after him. One of the men who had helped to pump the doc, having dried his face and neck, followed me. We passed inside, and I saw Douglas propped up and the doc bending over him, his black bag open at his side, steel instruments glinting in it, Apache Kid kneeling beside the doc with a sponge mopping away at Douglas' head. I saw the doc's hand come up with the gesture of one sewing with a short thread. I had never been in a hospital. I had never seen an accident, and I felt horribly sick.

Suddenly the man who had come in with me, a great, hulking fellow, said "Oh!" and staggered from the room onto the platform, and I heard his boots give a foolish clatter, heard a grunt, and, looking out, saw him in a dead faint outside. Some quite stalwart men are like that.

"Some more water!" I heard the doc's voice rasp, and I leaped to a pail and lifted it and carried it in.

"That'll do you," said the doc to Apache as I entered, and Apache rose as I set the pail down. I felt better now, though I knew my face was cold. Apache said: "He's all right now, doc?"

"He's all right," said the doc, and fell to sponging and cleaning his hands in the bucket, staring at Douglas the while.

Apache looked at me, and said: "Hullo, you look white."

"Queer!" I muttered. "I felt sick at first."

"Yes," he said. "Even a man who can hold off a gang of dagos may feel sick when he comes suddenly up against this side of life." He stretched erect, and said: "The only way to keep some sides of life from not making you sick is to get right in and do something. He's all right, doc?"

The doc looked up and took stock of Apache, evidently more carefully.

"All right, sir," he said. "We'll get

him down to Lone Tree Hospital when the train comes in."

"Then I'll get off to my appointment. So long, doc! So long, Scot! So long, kid!" He trotted out. "Hello!" I heard him say outside. "Feeling bad? Yes, I know. Yes—it does make you feel mean, doesn't it? Well, when a man's built that way there's no mere looking on possible for him—he must either step right in and be of use, or step right out—go get him to a nunnery, so to speak. But there's nothing to be ashamed about, sir. Ninety-nine out of a hundred can rubberneck over the heads of a crowd at a dog in a fit in the gutter, and neither go away nor help. That's humanity. You can get sick, sir, when you aren't helping, anyhow. So long! So long, boys! Where's my broncho? Oh, there he is. Hie! Hie! White-face!"

The doctor was drying his hands, half kneeling still at the bucket, half sitting on his heels—a whimsical smile spreading on his face.

"Who is the cowboy philosopher?" he said, as he put his towel in his bag on top of his instruments and cotton wool, and snapped it shut. He saw the cigarettes lying in the corner, stretched for one, wet it, and felt for matches.

"They call him Apache Kid," said Scot. "A light, doc?" and Scot tore off a Chinese match from a block, lit it on his pants, and held it while the sulphur burned.

The doc suddenly looked at me, and Scotty said "Damn!" as his fingers were burned.

"You've been scrapping!" said the doc, and looked at my battered face, touching it lightly. "Oh, I don't think you need anything much. If you like a little arnica—three parts water, and bathe that jaw."

"This is nothing," I said.

"Nothing by comparison," he agreed, and turned. Then he held his head forward, and lit the cigarette at Scotty's second match, and blew a cloud. The aroma of the weed filled the place very pleasantly. It seemed like vespers or a benediction. Douglas stirred, opened his eyes. He muttered something.

"Yes?" said the doc, and knelt to him.

"Give me a smoke," said Douglas.

Past the window, in the glaring sun, back of the railway track, the white pony charged in a quick lop, with Apache Kid bending forward and urging it on. A whirl of dust rose and fell.

Outside on the platform there was a shuffle of the men who had pumped the doctor up, getting into a shady place to wait for him; and then just the silence, with the little ceaseless crackling in it, of the grasshoppers, outside; and inside the faint clicking of the operator's instrument.

CHAPTER IV.

SCOTTY AND I HAVE NEWS.

I stepped over to the hotel for dinner. One or two men sat on the veranda with a hungry look, and I eyed them with interest, wondering whence they had come; among them sat, with a dictatorial air, a tall, bearded man, with a lean, red face, bloodshot eyes, and a beard like dirty tow. He saw me advance, and said he:

"Good day. Are you looking for the proprietor?"

"Proprietor?" said I. "I suppose he's inside."

The man gave a hiccup, and said: "This establishment has just changed hands. I'm the proprietor here now."

I saw the scattered men look at him curiously. They had the air of not taking part.

"Oh!" I said.

"Yes," said he. "Oh!—as you say. Do you want lunch?"

"Yes," I said. "I came over for lunch."

"Well," said he, "I'm very sorry, but I don't intend to have lunch here except for residents. I can't serve people passing through. Are you a hobo? I don't remember your face at all."

Now, a hobo is a tramp, a beggar at doors, and so I looked this drunken new proprietor, as he called himself, up and down, and said I:

"Seeing that I'm not going to eat at

your house—not even if you put up a free lunch—I don't see that you have any call to know anything about me. Good day to you—and I hope you may flourish in your establishment."

I wheeled about, and trudged back to the depot, more than ever conscious of my empty stomach, and intending to ask Scotty if I could obtain a lunch anywhere else, consoling myself, at least, with the recollection of the tinned goods in the store—tinned salmon, tinned tomatoes, tinned everything, all round the store in the deep shelves.

But hardly had I reached the platform, across the square, than one of those who had been sitting on the veranda came after me with a "Mister!"

I turned about.

"Say, mister," he said, "that fellow ain't the pro-prietor. The ho-tel ain't changed hands at all. Lunch will be on within half an hour. He's only a fellow who comes in from his ranch about once a month, and thinks he's a sure-thing wag. That's what he calls his fun, going on like that."

"Thank you very much, sir," I said. "I'll be over again for lunch, then. Thank you very much."

"Be careful of the wag," he suggested. "He sometimes gets nasty when people don't see that he's funny. The way you answered him just now puzzled him. He weren't sure how to take it. He carries a gun, too—and I see you don't." And with a nod he turned back for the hotel, but I remained, for the time being, because the whistle of an approaching train broke out just then far off in the hills, and I wanted to be on hand to help to carry Douglas aboard.

Scotty had come on the platform at sound of the whistle, carrying a red flag.

"Going to flag this freight," he said, "and get Douglas in the caboose."

The locomotive with its string of sun-scorched cars came in sight; Scotty waved his flag, and the string drew slowly into the depot—the conductor dropping off to see why he had been stopped.

"It's Douglas," said Scotty. "He's had an accident."

So we carried Douglas into the caboose at the end of the string of cars. The pump car on which the doc had come up was lifted onto a flat car, the men piled into the caboose, the doc followed—and away went the train.

I was unsettled, restless. I felt that something was going to happen. One does not often have such feelings in the sagebrush lands. Cities, jostling crowds, going up and down in elevators, hanging onto straps in crowded cars—these things breed the nervous sense of "something going to happen." The sagebrush makes one "feel good."

It must have taken us some time to get Douglas aboard, for, when I looked over to the hotel, I saw that the veranda was deserted. The men had evidently gone in to lunch.

"When do you take lunch?" I asked Scotty.

"Eat lunch, you mean," said he. "I eat lunch right now. When that freight goes through I'm free till the west-bound passenger. Are you going over?"

"Yes."

"Wait for me, then, till I lock the door."

"I shouldn't think you need lock a door here," I said.

"It's my instrument," he said. "I love that instrument of mine. I never leave it without locking the door. You come in, and I'll show you just what kind of instrument she is. She ain't a railway one. I always pack my own instrument everywhere."

And so he carried me in to expatriate on it, while my stomach cried more persistently for nourishment. The sagebrush lands nurture an appetite in a newcomer that is nothing short of fierce. I think Scotty talked for half an hour about his "instrument," waving his lean hands over it, talking about it in the way some parents talk about their children.

In to us, thus employed, following a courteous knock, came the man who had strolled over a little ago from the hotel to explain about the waggish individual's waggish attempt to make me have a lunchless day.

"Excuse me, gents," he said. "Lunch

is pretty nearly through. If you don't come—"

"Oh, they always save me my lunch," began Scotty.

"I told the proprietor that you were wanting lunch, sir," to me.

"We'll get," said Scotty, and waved his arm like a man herding hens, seemed to bundle us out of the room, looking at the newcomer sternly, as if he would bid him keep his eyes off the treasured instrument.

We had just come to the platform steps at the end of the depot buildings, the cowboy who had been so solicitous about my lunch a little in advance.

"What's this!" he cried, looking across toward the hotel.

There we stood and stared. The hay-beard person who was "in town" to have a "good time" was gathering up the reins of a very excited horse, a horse standing in the shafts of a light buckboard like a hound in leash. From far off as we stood even we could see by the gestures of hay-beard, he sitting on the seat with legs outthrust, that he was grandiloquently inebriated.

A man ran out of the hotel door, dashed across the veranda, and snatched for the horse's head. The horse swerved away. The man who had tried to catch its head vaulted over the rail; but his feet sank so deep in the sand that he half fell. As he did so hay-beard gave the whip a wild sweep, yelled, wheeled away from the hotel, and fiercely urged the horse. It plunged through the sand, found firmer footing on the wagon road that twined past the hotel and up to the railway track, which it crossed on planks laid between the rails.

Up came the buckboard, hay-beard wielding the long lash of the whip. He drove splendidly—too splendidly. There was too much drunken swagger about it. He caught sight of us as he swept along the wagon road, waved a mocking arm to us, wheeled the buckboard abruptly at the bend onto the track, and—well! The next thing we saw was the horse galloping across the track, with a shaft hanging to left, a shaft to right; the buckboard overturned; hay-beard on his chest, legs in air, chin sticking out like

one swimming, still clutching the reins. Then he went head over heels at the sloping planks that led up to the track, and rolled over and over there. The horse simply crossed the track, wheeled about, flung its head up, and, turning round, trotted back to the hotel veranda—and stood there!

Out of the hotel poured the men, and ran in the direction of hay-beard. We, on our part, merely watched from the platform. Hay-beard rose, aided slightly by the man who had tried to catch the horse from the veranda, stood staring and feeling his side, felt his arm, and came over to the depot, the cluster of men to rear, with evidently the owner of the horse and buckboard strutting beside him with determined jowl.

"Is the doc here? They tell me the doc is here. Is he gone?" asked hay-beard.

"Yap! Gone l!" snapped Scotty.

"I've broke my arm," said hay-beard, and he swore.

Scotty stepped down.

"Let me feel," and he felt the arm. "Maybe it's only twisted. Yap! Broken!"

"When's the next train?"

"You know the trains."

"I mean a freight train. Any freight before the passenger?"

"Nope—not another," and Scotty moved off.

"Oh, well, I'll set in the shade here, and wait for the train," and hay-beard, with his arm hanging loose, moved off to the end of the station buildings.

"Couldn't you wire for the doc again?" I asked.

"For him? No! He ain't got no appreciation. He's the kind of man if I wire for the doc he would think me his slave—and he would like as not try to stand off paying the doc his fee and I would go and offer to pay it, and the doc would be indignant and say 'Call off—call off!'—and that coyote would think he had done a smart deal. That's the kind of man he is. Come and eat."

The little crowd thinned, even the owner of the buckboard departing with a mere: "Well, mister, you're going to pay for a new buckboard when you get

on your legs again." We went to "eat" lunch, Scotty and I, in the sun-blinded, cool rear room of the hotel.

There had been plenty of incidents in that day. But I still felt more looking on at a show than as if they were my own incidents. You understand me? These were not my affairs.

We ate lunch, and sat on the veranda afterward with the remaining boys. One by one they departed—disappearing from the veranda, and anon reappearing on horseback and riding out of Black Kettle, one, who carried a blanket roll on his saddle, riding away by the wagon road across the railway and straight uphill. Another, who also packed a blanket, I noticed, rode away back of Black Kettle into the great plain striped with brush, and anon with sand, and anon with grassy stretches. From the end of the house one could see him fade in that immensity.

I sat there smoking, watching two more riders cross the track. I heard the flap-flap of the boards as the ponies stepped over the crossing, watched the horses go up and up—noted how they seemed, as they took the last roll, very tall, and their riders very tall, then how they went over the last roll like little boats over a wave, and disappeared.

At last one said: "It do seem a pity for him over there. Reckon I'll step over and see how he's making out," and he stepped off the veranda and went plowing over to the depot buildings.

Just there he stopped, and we who still sat on the veranda looked up. A frightful yelling broke out westward, and grew louder. Then a metallic rattling. What was it? Was it the dago gang? Had they come by some liquor up there at the camp, and were they coming down to Black Kettle?

The rattling grew in volume—the rattle of a hand car. There is a kind of agitation comes over one when any noise breaks out that one does not understand. It was a relief to recognize the sound of a hand car. Then suddenly round the bend came two horsemen, riding parallel with the track; they were whooping, screaming; and on the track—urging their hand car and whooping

and yelling—came the section gang, the gang whose boss had been so decent to me.

It was only an arrival in town.

The men on the veranda smiled, and tilted their chairs afresh, and leaned their backs to the wall, puffed their cigars into a glow. The horsemen, with final yells, rode clean up to the hitching posts, flung off their horses, and came over to the hotel—less elegant on foot than on horseback, for they were both bow-legged with much riding—clattered up the steps, and entered.

The section men's car slid into the depot beside the platform before they could stop it. They stepped off, laughing. Then we saw them talking to hay-beard, and presently hay-beard got up from where he had been lying limp, and, with much grimacing with the pain of his arm, got over to the hand car, and stood on it. The men all piled on again, and away they went, hay-beard propped in the center beside the pump.

"That section boss is a very good sort," said a man, bringing his chair down from the tilt, rose, said: "Well, so long, gents," and departed.

Scotty also rose and stretched.

"Come over," he said. "I got to get over."

I strolled across with him, loafed for an hour or so about his door, merely acclimatizing myself, letting the air of the place lull me; but still with that sense of waiting.

"Say, I forgot to give you your mail," said Scotty. "Something for you," and he handed me a fat packet that he had discovered.

It was a bundle of old country papers from a New York agency. I opened them easily—thinking how cute I had been to write immediately on my arrival at Black Kettle for Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, London papers, all together, and not to write for those only on and after the date of my encounter with the blackmailing tramp, but for a full month before that date.

It was, of course, only the Glasgow *Herald* I troubled about now. I was the boy to cover my tracks, I thought. I was a "cute" individual. I opened the

Herald of the day after that trouble with the lurcher. I glanced it through—no—no “horrible discovery.”

I glanced through the next day’s. No, nothing. I looked through the *Heralds* for the whole week. Nothing! Nothing at all about the body behind the bushes.

I looked up abruptly, and found Scotty scrutinizing me under his thin brows, and biting the ragged end of his yellowed mustache. He let his gaze lose its intentness, did not look away, but gazed, as it were, absently through me.

I returned to my perusal, but with a manner guardedly easy, looking up and down the columns more lightly—I hoped not too lightly, lest my change of manner might but increase Scotty’s curiosity. Suddenly I saw this :

The tramp who was found in the park overlooking —— Terrace three days ago, and taken to the Western Infirmary, has regained consciousness. Although he has clearly been assaulted, and is suffering from injuries received, he will say nothing of how he came by his injuries.

I sat back in my chair. I forgot all about Scotty again. I only thought: “He didn’t die! I need never have bolted at all!”

Scotty’s beloved instrument was tick-ticking, and he bent to it. The tick-ticking went on. I sat looking at a muss of type, a haze of print. I sat with the papers on my lap, staring—and then, slowly my eye seemed to focus to the print again. What was this? I choked and stared and looked at the paper.

Suddenly, at —— Gardens, Jane Elizabeth Barclay.

If that accursed tramp had been within reach I would have killed him indeed then! He lived—and my mother was dead—no need to ask how—of a broken heart at my nonappearance, at my disappearance. I stood up, so Scotty told me afterward, and raising my fist to heaven cried: “O God! O God! O God!”

But at the time Scotty was eager on something else, and he only shouted: “Shut up! Dammit!”

I sat down, it seems. The instrument

ceased to click its long message. He turned to me, and said:

“Say! Say! What do you think? The passenger has been held up at Antelope Spring!”

“Oh!” I said, and sat with gulping breaths.

“Held up!” he shouted. “Who by, do you think? Jumping Moses! By the Apache Kid! What do you think of that? They’re going right through to Lone Tree—nonstop—to get next to the sheriff there.”

“Eh? Oh—that’s very interesting,” I said.

“Interesting?” he cried. “You—you’re bughouse!” And he fled out to pour his news into some more sane ears.

I heard, anon, a whistle scream outside—heard the roar of a train coming into Black Kettle—heard it pass on, without cessation. The room hummed with its passage and clatter—and then a whistle beyond Black Kettle pealed out—another farther off—and silence fell again.

CHAPTER V.

YUMA BILL CHIRKS ME UP.

Enter to me, where I sat among the piles of old country papers, the cowboy who had been so anxious about my lunch, a tall, rudely handsome man, with bright eyes and bad teeth; in loose, cotton jacket, striped black and white; and with leather chaps over his pants, belted and gunned in the manner of his kind.

“Cheer up, mister,” he said.

I looked up, more in amazement at his attitude toward me, I think, more wondering what he bade me to cheer up over, than with any other thought.

“If you’re gone broke, why, I have a few dineros, and you just got to say the word, and any little I can do—why, there you are. I hear there’s the superintendent of the division coming up to see into the trouble at the gravel pit where you bin working. Your money from the railway is safe enough.”

“It’s not that,” I said, and rose and laughed. “I didn’t think I looked worried about it.”

He looked at the pile of papers on the floor, looked at me, looked at them.

"Bad news?" he asked.

"Very bad," I said. And then: "It can't be mended. There—it's past. It's over."

He stood thoughtful a moment, hitched his chaps, put his thumb in his belt.

"Do you want a job?" he asked.

"I do," I said. "I don't suppose I'm bound to wait here till the white gang comes to the steam shovel."

"Oh!" he cried. "That was the idee, was it? No, sir—not you. A man like you don't want a moling job. I see—you was broke, and so you went on with the dago push till such times as the white gang would come along?"

I nodded.

"Pshaw! A man like you don't want to go burrowing in no railway excavations. It's an outsider's job—making railways, hittin' spikes in ties, and boltin' on fishplates, and fillin' up trestle bridges. When I heard you was on the railway I took no note of you. Then I heard you was the one white man in a dago push, and I think to myself: 'He's either plumb locoed, or else he's too green to burn, or else he's lookin' for trouble.' Then I heerd the way you talked to Mike Mills—him that meddled with Jamieson's high-stepper. Jamieson says he's going to get the price of that busted buggy out of him so soon as he comes back with his arm mended. I says to the boys: 'Is that there, then, the white gent that has been working with the dagos?' 'That's him,' they says. So I considered you was just ignorant here, though maybe wise where you came from, and a pilgrim in a strange land. That was why I stepped over to post you about Mike Mills' wit. And now, friend, I'm riding over to the ranch, and if you care to come with me—why—I guess there's a job for you right there. You savvy horses, do you?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Steers?"

"No," I said. "I know a little about sheep."

He seemed quite taken aback.

"You ain't ever bin a sheep-herder?" he asked plaintively.

"No," I said; "but at a place in the old country for two months every year I used to do nothing but work among the sheep."

"I see—in your college vacation. College man, you are?"

I nodded.

"I've met no end of college men," he said. "I had a partner in the Panamint country once—college man—Harvard—he was a teamster. Then I took out once into the country back of the Tetons a college gent who had come West to photograph elk. He was all right. He was quite a white man, and if he didn't savvy a thing, he asked and learned. But he didn't have to ask much. He had the savvy, and could figure out most things with looking at them thoughtful.

"Then once, right here, on this yere platform, there comes along a hobo; he had got flung off the freight halfway between here and Lone Tree. Some devilment makes me throw a lariat of friendship over him, and corral him over into the ho-tel, and put tongue-loosener into him—Harvard man! Oh, straight goods! He wasn't bluffing me. He told me a heap about his means of livelihood—low-down and mean and all that, from my point of view, made me sick now and then, but he had a kind of edge of humor on him that laughed at himself, and I was not out to criticize him, but to hear more about other kinds of life than my own.

"He asked me if I ever seed initials up on water tanks.

"Sure," I says.

"That's us," he explains. "Now, I put up my sign N. Y. Y. T."

"Like a registered brand," says I.

"Sure," says he, very friendly. "And N. Y. Y. T. stands for New York Whitey. I'm the poet of the hobos," he says, and I asks him for one of his pomes. It ha'nted me so that I got him to sing it three times, him being that full of song and stagger-juice. Here it is," and my new friend—Panamint Pete, by the way, was his picturesque name—began to carol to me the ditty of

N. Y. Y.-T. in a friendly attempt, as I understood afterward, to "chirk me up some!" He acknowledged his aim later, when we were better acquainted. I had no idea, at the time, of his sympathetic intention as he sang:

"It was at a Western water tank
One cold December day,
Within an empty box car
A poor dying hobo lay.

"His comrade sat beside him
With sad and drooping head,
And patiently he listened
To what his dying comrade said.

"I am going," said John Yegdom,
"To a land that is fair and bright,
Where the weather is always warm enough
To sleep outside at night;

"Where hand-outs grow on the bushes,
And folks never wash their socks,
And little streams of alcohol
Come trickling down the rocks;

"Tell my boy down in Clark Street,
The next time his face you view,
That I've taken the Great Eternal Freight,
And I'm going to ride her through.

"Tell him not to weep for me,
In his eye no tear must lurk,
For I am going to the land
Where no man has to work:

"Hark! I hear that center whistle,
I must take her on the fly,
Good-by, my dear old comrade,
'Tis not so hard to die."

"He closed his eyes, he bowed his head,
He never spoke again,
His comrade left him lying there,
And took the rods of an eastbound train."

"Yes, sir, that's the song of N. Y. Y. T.—New York Whitey—which he was named because he was what they call prematurely gray—with a white head of hair that would have made anybody gentle with him, and fatherly. Well—say—do you figure on coming up with me and touching the boss for a job? You can get your wages from Scotty here, if—"

Scotty entered, and Pete turned to him.

"Say! You could get this gent's wages, and hold them for him till such times as he calls?"

"Wages! Wages! Say! Have

either of you touched my instrument? Wages! Wages! There ain't no wages! The train's been held up, by heck! Express safe emptied."

"You told me so an hour ago," said Pete, "and your little instrument's been sneezing there powerful."

Scotty put his hand in his trousers pocket and drew forth a plug of tobacco with a bite out of it, took another bite, and sat down to his instrument.

As it tip-tapped Pete turned to me and quietly said:

"What do you think?"

I nodded.

"Thank you very much. Yes, I'll come."

"That's right. You can git a hoss from old Colonel White, over at the store. He runs a kind of livery stable. We'll look in again, Scotty."

"All right!" snapped Scotty, and off we went to Colonel White, the silent old storekeeper of the gruff but amicable "How-do."

Yes, he had a "hoss." I would take care of it? I could have it for two dollars up to the ranch.

"What about bringing it back? When will we be coming in again?" I asked Pete.

The colonel rose from the tub on which he sat, and stared at me.

"That's all right," said Pete. "The colonel's hosses can come home fifty mile, let alone fifteen, or twelve. We raise sech hosses in old pigeon houses in this part of the world, and they learn the homing instinct from the smell of the homers. Things is different here from back East."

I had but a few dollars left, and I gave two of them to the colonel for the hire of a restive cayuse.

I paid my bill at the hotel, bought a gray blanket at the store, as the blankets I had bought when going up to the gravel pit were still there; and then we rode over to the depot, where I stepped off onto the platform and walked down to ask Scotty to see about getting my wages from the railway.

"Better leave me a note," he said, "so that I can show it to the pay clerk when

he comes along." He pointed to a pad and pencil on his table.

"What shall I write?"

"I don't know—say—there's been a great holdup, Apache Kid and some other man not known—just the two of them. Eh? Oh, well," he scratched his hair, already disheveled with much scratching. "Well—oh, heck!—I don't know. Say 'Dear Scotty, please get my wages due for work on dago gang when the pay clerk comes up. I shall call for them when I'm in town again.' By heck! A holdup in this division—Apache Kid and another not known! Ah! But that ain't all! Say, don't you tell anybody! I ought not to tell you this, but you are not everybody—they've not only got a haul of express money, but they've got a bunch of government bonds! Government papers! By heck! Apache Kid is up against it this time. He was suspected once before, you know. I'm sorry. Liked that man."

"So did I."

"So you would, so would anybody. All right." He snatched my hand. "So long—I'll keep it for you all right," and he tapped the note I had written.

"By heck, government bonds!" I left him muttering. "That'll cinch up Apache tighter than anything."

But Scotty had not as long a head as the Apache Kid. A good many people were to be astonished at the use that the Apache Kid was to make of these government bonds.

I stepped out again, mounted the colonel's horse. We rode across the track, where the loose planks at the crossing said "Whack! Whack! Whack!" under the ponies' hoofs, and took the roll of the first bench out of Black Kettle.

CHAPTER VI.

I RIDE TO THE DIAMOND K.

We mounted up the rolls of the benches less inclined for talk than for relishing the motion of the horses under us.

There was something, that I can find no word to describe so well as "callous-

ness," had come into me—or perhaps I do myself an injustice, perhaps I was merely stunned with regret, remorse. The words of the newspaper announcement still danced before my eyes, but I refused to consider them. I could not.

My deepest memory of these benches is my first. I seemed to look at them out of the torture of humanity, and see them as amazingly great, spacious, and healing. Had I stayed over at one of these little hamlets down in some deep cañon, with a dark river thundering past, and the high cañon walls shortening the day, I think, on receipt of the news, on comprehending the needlessness of my flight, and considering the result of it, I should have gone mad, and dashed myself into the turbid creek. Had I been in a city I think I should have run amuck. And yet I do not know. When, later, I told Apache Kid something of these feelings—for I was to meet him again, as you shall hear—he listened with a more robust thing than sympathy, with pity; and then, with puckering eyes, looked into the distance, taking his pipe from his mouth, and tapping his teeth with the stem in a way he had.

"Yes," he said. "I know. The trouble is that many men who feel things that way only go and get drunk."

We rode up, Pete and I, silently to the topmost crest advancing into the golden sunset and lingering day, and turned around on the crest, with hands on ponies' haunches, looking back on Black Kettle. I remember a queer thought I had then that, as a kid, I had pictured myself sitting so, had set so ætat seven on a rocking-horse, imagining. Some dreams come true. But we change. I had not thought of the manner of man I might be when the picture part of the dream should be fulfilled.

We looked down into the valley, and already the railway line was dwarfed. It was the merest, insignificant thread coming out of a hardly discernible little hole in the hill to the northeast, sweeping round the foot of the benches, and lost in the sand hills southwestward. Even the handful of roofs of Black Kett-

tle, that from the car windows looked so whimsically trivial in the landscape, looked, from this high vantage, far more important than the railway.

I was gaining a better-balanced view of things. We topped the rise, riding on, and then I gasped. I think a good tonic for human misery, and for human woes that lead us not through a narrow and darkened way into some better prospect, but lead us instead into a cul-de-sac, is change of scene. We took the rise, and a high wind, that stirred the bunch grass and the sagebrush, and flicked the horses' manes, came fresheningly on my cheeks. But the great thing was the farther view, burst upon us—a valley, sloping and widening beneath us with the silver of a creek in its depth, with dotted trees low down, with belts of trees above, with the green and gray of bunch grass, sage and sand still higher, and far off the white of snows—or glaciers—glinting on the peaks of the loftier mountains.

We took the slopes to left, and rode on along a half trail, half wagon road, feeling very high and airy. The valley had the appearance of knowing two periods of the day at once; the western slope already showed the hue of twilight, the eastern had the aspect of late afternoon. There was just that indescribable sense of warning spoke to one out of the colors, the lights and shadows, the kind of warning that savage peoples, living close to nature, perfectly understand, as do those fashionable persons of the East, where it is the habit to ring thrice before dinner, understand the significance of the gong—to wash, to be finished dressing, to file into the dining room.

There was no attempt at ballasting on this half wagon road, the passage of hoofs and occasional wagons giving a kind of surface hardness which made easy going for the ponies. They, too, freshened after climbing the benches, tossed their heads in preparation for a quickening lope. At a declivity they went with a swirl, at a rise they slackened.

Then suddenly raising my eyes I saw before us, by the trailside, a little house.

"This here," said Pete, "that we're coming to is what they call an experimental farm. A man they call Johnson has come along up here, and reckons he can grow fruit trees in the sand. We'll pull up and bid him good evening. You'll find him a diversion."

But my intuitive sense, very distinctly wakening, and I aware of its awakening, told me that the cabin was deserted. It was not only the intense silence of the slopes told me no one was there. Town folk, or Easterners, may smile at this remark, and I do not blame them, but it may have befallen them to come to some house in the city, to ring the bell, to hear the bell clang within, and to have felt somehow that it clanged in an empty house. I do not say an unfurnished house, but a house in which there was no human being. If my reader still disagrees—good! it is no matter; let us shake hands and pass on to my yarn. Anyhow, the house was deserted.

We rode up to the door. Only silence. We dismounted. Only the breathing of the ponies. Pete, with the reins in his hands, knocked at the door.

"Maybe sleeping," he said, "but I don't think so. Seems to be from home."

He looked in at the little window.

"Say," he said, "the sight of that teapot on the top of the stove sure invites me in."

He went back to the door, and pressed it with his palm several times vigorously. Each time it gave a little. He gave a hard push, and stepped back so that the door sprung. Something fell within. He gave the door another push, and it opened.

"Nobody in," he said, and put the reins of his pony over a hook at the door, and entered. I followed.

"Stove still hot," he said. "Well, we'll make some tea, and leave a little note to tell Johnson that we looked in in passing, and that his blamed teapot looked so sociable that we took the liberty of using it."

He took up a stick, smartly whittled a pile of shavings into the still-warm stove, blew upon them, dropped in a match, and presently we were tasting

the rankest, but most relishable tea I think I ever imbibed. Pete sat on the little table, swinging a leg; I sat on the edge of a bunk.

"Sorry about that Apache Kid," he said suddenly. "I worked with him once up Kettle River way. I remember the marshal of Baker City discussin' hard cases with me, and saying that that there Apache Kid was one of the most interestin' so-called 'bad men' with whom he had ever had any dealings. Up at Baker City some of the old-timers is as full of stories of the Apache Kid as a storybook."

"Well," I said, "I think I may say that I owe Apache Kid my life."

"You mean up at the dago gang?" he said.

I nodded, thinking over the affair.

"Can you recount that story?" he asked. "It was only a kind of a hint of it I had from Scotty. Course we all knew something had happened when Douglas got his head smashed. I was going to ask Scotty for the rights of the story when he got plumb locoed over the news of the holdup that he got off what he calls his 'little instrument,' of which he's more fond than a widower of an only girl. There was no use asking him for the story then. Was it a dago hit Douglas, anyhow? Shorely not."

"No, no," said I, and I told him the whole story. I had just come to the point of saying: "And when that white dago, as I suppose you'd call him, came over to my side, and we stood there to put up what we both, I expect, thought was going to be the toughest fight of our lives, over the little rise above the pit—perhaps you know it?"

"I know it," said he, "the old trail to Black Kettle goes down from here round that way, on to the other side of the valley."

We had, then, just got that length, and I was saying: "Well, over the top, and sliding his pony down to us, came the Apache Kid with his revolver—"

"Gun!" said Pete.

"Gun," said I, "in his hand—"

"What's that?" said Pete suddenly, and rose, and I was aware that as we had talked the twilight had been run-

ning into night. His face was indistinct in this little interior, his rising form merged with the shadows behind it. There was a slapping of ponies' hoofs outside the door, a sound quite like a cavalcade, a rush and a whirl, the creak of a saddle as some one flung off, dismounting abruptly, and then a "Hello! Look up!"

Pete, who knew his country, relieved the situation.

"All right, gents!" he hailed.

"Who's yere?" came a voice from outside.

"That you, Mr. Johnson?" said Pete.

"It's me. Who are you?" Mr. Johnson did not come into his own shack.

"It's Panamint Pete," said my friend, stepping out to the door. "Your teapot kind of invited me in, and I accepted the invitation, which I knew you would have given. No offense, I hope?"

"No—that's all right," said Johnson's voice, and he came to the door. Suddenly he stepped back.

"Friend with you?" he said.

"That's all right," came another voice that I thought I knew, and very smartly past Johnson and Pete, with three lithe strides, came the other man.

"Apache!" I cried.

"Hello, kid!" he said. "It's you." He struck a match on his pants, lit the lamp. "Come in, gents," he said.

Pete stepped in, his eyes watchful in the new lamplight. Johnson stood scowling. Pete sat down on a stool. He looked from Apache to Johnson, then back.

"It's all right, Apache," he said. "We've heard the news."

Apache swung round quickly, but not toward Pete. It was toward Johnson.

"He's all right, Jake," he said. "And now, gentlemen, would you be so kind as to turn your faces to the wall and count twenty."

With a laugh, Pete turned, and I turned also. There took place a great rustling as of stiff parchment, a muttering between Johnson and the Apache Kid, and then the Apache Kid's voice: "That's all right."

Pete turned.

"Only got the length of eighteen, Apache," he said.

"You always were a white man," said the Apache Kid. "Some men might have counted forty in the time. Well, so long, boys. So long, mister," to me.

I stepped over and held out my hand. The two train robbers moved outside smartly, we heard the saddles creak as they mounted. There was a "Get up! Get up, you!"—and away they swept in the growing darkness.

Pete strode over to the door, and looked after them.

"Two led saddle horses," said he, "and two pack horses. They're going to travel."

The dust fell on the road, the sound of the hoofs died abruptly.

"Well," I said, "I'm the last man to set up as a judge of the Apache Kid, but do you know I was glad to shake his hand just now. It's a very strange thing, but I never thanked him for what he did for me up at the gravel pit. All the way down to Black Kettle, with Douglas, I was trying to think out some

way of thanking him. I would look at him and begin, and then—no, couldn't do it. He didn't seem a man that one could thank."

"Yes, I know," said Pete. "Here's to him, anyhow," and he raised the tin pannikin, and drank the cold dregs of his tea.

And then we put the log back against the door, opened the window, put a stick under it to hold it up as we crawled through, for it was innocent of pulleys and weights—crawled through, mounted under the first stars and rode on, took a narrow trail hitting off from this trail, and at length, in the deep purple of the valley, a light flashed up.

"That's the Diamond K," said Pete, and put spurs to his horse—which, indeed, hardly needed the spur, being as keen as he on that final spectacular rush home—let out a whoop and a scream; my pony, not to be outdone, stretched himself in pursuit, drew nearly level, and so, with Pete, screaming like eagles and howling like wolves, we swept down on the Diamond K.

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE AUGUST 23RD.



LIFE OUT OF A DEAD TOWN

WE are not the victims of our environment! The God-given spirit that is within us rises superior to our surroundings! We burst asunder the chain of adverse circumstance! We soar on the wings of aspiration far above the drab and dusty shackles locked upon our limbs! This is a fact. It can be proved. It can be demonstrated by one observation.

Here it is:

Harrison Fisher, the painter and illustrator, the wizard of color, was born in Brooklyn, New York.



A MATTER OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

SAMUEL GOMPERS was giving it as his opinion that in exciting times people are apt to accuse the wrong man. It suggested to him the story about the young lady in Toledo.

This girl had been receiving now and then a young man who had never made love to her, but had admired her greatly. One evening, before the girl entered the parlor, her mother appeared, and asked in a rough, stern tone of voice what his intentions were. Not having any intentions, the youth turned every color of the rainbow, and succeeded in saying nothing. His suffering was ended by the entrance of the girl, who exclaimed:

"Mother! Mother! That is not the one."

The Mexican Marvel

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "Won Off the Diamond," "The Pitch-Out," Etc.

Concerning one Ramon d'Enchiladas Oliveras, who had the reputation of being the warmest little second baseman that ever wrestled the husk off a tamale, or smothered a platter of frijoles. Ramon had been setting the Rio Grande on fire with his sensational performances. There were still more sensational performances ahead of him which he didn't anticipate.

YES, sir," said old Joey Bostwick, the scout, "he's the greatest second baseman in the business to-day, *bar none!* You know me, Dick. I've been here, and I've been there, and I've looked at 'em all, one way and another; but you never heard me make a crack like that before in my life. I never go round shooting off my mouth about what a great player I've found. I let *them* prove that; but this time, Dick, I've dug up a man worth hollering about, and I don't care if he *is* a coon, I say he's the greatest second baseman in America to-day. I bar nobody!"

Dick Kelly, manager of the Orphans, listened to the impassioned statement of his old scout with the trace of a grin on his face. Never before had he seen the veteran "so worked up," as he would have expressed it.

"But don't you see, Joey," remarked Kelly, "that it wouldn't make any difference *how* good he is? He might be far and away the best second baseman in the world, but his color bars him. He can't get in. A nigger on a big-league ball club? Wake up, Joey, wake up!"

"Dick," said the scout, with ominous politeness, "are you a-goin' to listen to me or not? Who was it that went out in the bushes and got 'Splint' MacLean? Who was it went down into the jungles

and came back with 'Boneface' Harmon? Hey?"

"You did it," said Kelly solemnly. "I've always said you could fall in a sewer, and come out with a ball player in each hand."

Bostwick sniffed scornfully at this veiled reference to luck.

"Did I suggest your getting this coon on the club—as a coon?" demanded Bostwick. "Of course not! You make me tired. When it comes to jumpin' at conclusions, you're the greatest lepper that ever come out of Ireland. Listen now till I tell you. It was out in Lima, Ohio, that I saw this bird—his name's Buckner, and they call him Bud for short—and he was with a coon team that was touring around the country in a private car, meeting all comers. The minute I saw this Buckner in action, it hit me that there was class sticking out all over him—good enough, just as he is, to play on any club in the country. Dick, I give you my word he covers that infield like a carpet, and when it comes to getting the ball on a runner he's all—"

"You said all that before, Joey," said Kelly. "What's the use in going all over the ground again? He's a coon, and that lets him out." Kelly snapped his fingers as if dismissing the subject into thin air.

Joey Bostwick fairly wriggled with impatience, indignation, and other unholy emotions.

"Can't you *wait*?" he cried. "I'm no fool! I know you can't get a coon on a club in this or any other league, but you tell me now is there any law against your playing a *Mexican*?"

"A *what*?" demanded Dick Kelly, surprised in spite of himself.

"A Mexican," answered the old man. "I'll spell it for you if you want me to. I guess there ain't anybody in this league would raise any objections to playing baseball with a high-class Mexican, if he was well advertised as such, eh?"

Kelly lowered the front legs of his chair to the floor, and flipped away his cigar end.

"Joe," he asked, "what are you getting at, anyway?"

"Just this," said Bostwick: "We could pass this fellow Buckner off as a Mexican as easy as rollin' off a log."

"Go 'way!" said the manager. "Why, a Mexican's hair is straight, and—"

"Are you going to let me finish, or not?" howled Bostwick. "That's you all over, Dick, setting in your stack before the cards are dealt! Now, keep your shirt on, and listen to me a minute. I went down to that private car, and I had a talk with this Buckner. It he'd been made to order for the part, he wouldn't fit in any better. In the first place, he ain't so black as he might be—sort of a nice smooth coffee color. In the second place, his hair is nearly as straight as yours—what you've got left. Only the least little bit of a wave to it. He's a right handsome-looking fellow. Once in a while you see 'em like that. First I was thinking we could spring him as a Cuban—"

"Nix!" said Kelly shortly. "That's old stuff. That Cuban thing has been worked to death by people who never saw the island—not even on a map. Why, all you've got to do is to say 'Cuban,' and you'll make people suspicious. Nix on the Pearl of the Antilles."

"Just the way I had it figured out!" said Bostwick. "Now, this Mexican gag is a thousand per cent stronger. In the

first place, it's never been done that I know of. In the second place, how many of these Easterners have ever seen a Mexican to know him? Not one in a million! Mexicans are mostly too poor to travel, and those that can afford it always chuck a bluff that they're Spaniards. Yes, Buckner will have to be a Mexican, or a cross between a Mexican and an Indian, and all he'll have to do is to change his name. That's dead easy. Don Juan Garcia, or Haysoose Maria Martinez, or any old thing. Easy? Well, I should say!"

"I'm afraid," said Kelly, and there was in his tone a hint of uncertainty, as if, in spite of himself, he had been weighing the matter in his mind, "I'm afraid it's no use, Joey. It couldn't be done. If we play this fellow for a Mexican, every Mexican in this part of the country would make it his business to look up Buckner and have a chat with him, and if the coon couldn't come through with the language—"

Old man Bostwick brought his fist down with a tremendous thump.

"But he *can*!" he cried. "That's the best part of it—he can! This Buckner talks that Mexican Spanish all same a sailor's parrot. I guess I forgot to mention to you that he lived down in Presidio County, Texas, for five years when he was a kid, and that's right on the Mexican line. Why, he can sling that chile-con-carne conversation so thick and fast it would make your head swim! Talk the language? Why, he can eat it alive!"

"The dickens you say!" exclaimed Kelly. "Why didn't you tell me that before? You always tell a story backward, anyway. Now, how much more information have you got tucked away inside that thick skull of yours?"

Joey Bostwick grinned, and, taking a fattish, pale cigar from his vest pocket, proceeded to poison the atmosphere with its fumes.

"Of course," he said, at last, between puffs, "you won't want him this season. It's too late, and, anyway, you haven't got a burglar's chance to finish better than fourth."

Kelly grunted.

"Yes, yes; go on!" he said. "That ain't news!"

"Now, here's my idea," continued the scout: "The first thing to be done is to *plant* this fellow—hide him out some place where we can go and discover him. Savvy? And, as he's going to be a Mexican, the natural place to plant him would be down near the Mexican line, wouldn't it? Sure! New Mexico would do, in a pinch, or even Arizona; but the best place would be El Paso. Juarez is right across the river, and Mexicans are thicker in El Paso than flies in a soup kitchen. Another thing: Down in that country they play ball pretty much all the year round, and Buckner could horn into one of those semipro outfits under the name of Miguel Garcia, or anything else that sounds Mexican, and there he'd be, waiting to be discovered.

"Of course, you'll have to grease his mitt with pork-and-bean money over the winter, but that wouldn't amount to much. Then, to make the play strong, you could send one of the other scouts down there to look this fellow over in the regular way. I'd suggest Bill Carter for the job, because Bill has never been south of St. Louis in his life, and he wouldn't know a Mexican from any other smoked-up citizen. Bill will report this fellow to be a bear, and then all you'll have to do is to come out in the Sunday papers with the statement that you have grabbed Señor Ramon Oliveras, the greatest Mexican second baseman in the world, for the usual spring try-out. Why, Dick, it'll work like a charm!"

"Just a second," said the cautious Kelly. "Are there any Mexican baseball players?"

"Huh!" said Bostwick. "You'd think so if you'd ever spent six months in New Mexico or Arizona. Some of 'em ain't half bad, either. Great fielders, but mighty few of 'em can hit."

"Last question," said Kelly. "Is this Buckner smooth enough not to tip his mitt? Could he get by the boys on the club? He'd have to be with 'em all the time, and—you understand?"

"Well, Dick," said Bostwick, "I'll tell

you how smooth he is. I went down to that private car, and started to jump him a little, and he smoked me out right away. Yes, sir, he called the turn on me so pat that it like to've jarred me off my feet. *He* knew what I was after, and then he opened up. It seems he's always wanted to play big-league baseball, and he'd spent some time figuring out how it could be worked. To tell you the real truth about it, it was his idea to spring himself as a Mexican."

"The deuce you say!" ejaculated Kelly.

"I thought of planting him down in Texas," said Bostwick, unwilling to lose all the credit for the scheme. "He can talk that Mexican pidgin English to the queen's taste, so that it would fool anybody. Now, listen to this—here's another one of his ideas: He's tied up to that club he's playing with on a long contract. If he ran out, they'd naturally wonder what had become of him, and they'd be looking for him, because he's a star player. They wouldn't let him get away without a battle. Now, look how he's got it figured out.

"If he gets word from me—and he gave me their route, so I could write him—he'll be taken sick—awful sick. He'll have all the symptoms of 'pendicitis, or something like that, and of course they'll have to put him into a hospital somewhere, and leave him behind. After a few weeks he'll fake a letter, supposed to be from a doctor, saying that Mr. Buckner is in such a bad way that he won't ever be able to play baseball again. They'll never question it; he'll drop out of sight, and that'll make him just the same as dead to those folks. They won't ever expect to see him come to life in the big league; whereas, if he ran away, they might. See? Is he smooth, Dick? Well, what do you think?"

"He'll do!" said the manager, with a long breath. "Get in touch with him as soon as you can; and, by the way, you'd better tip it to him to have inflammatory rheumatism. It's darned dangerous to tell a doctor that you think you've got appendicitis, because then nothing will do but he's dead anxious to split you

open and go prowling around inside of you. I've known 'em to leave a pair of shears inside a guy so they could come back and play a return engagement. Appendicitis sounds fine, but it ain't safe. Tell him to have inflammatory rheumatism, by all means!"

"I got you!" said Joey Bostwick.
"Rheumatism it is!"

Extract from sporting page of *Morning Flashlight*, September 18, 19—:

Our old friend, Gumshoe Bill Carter, arrived from the West yesterday with the cheering information that the hole at second base will be neatly plugged next season. Bill is quite enthusiastic over his latest find, the same being a full-blooded Mexican named Ramon Oliveras. Bill says Ramon is all to the good, and the most remarkable fielder and hitter discovered by him in years. A Mexican baseball player would be a decided novelty. This rare bird was trapped in El Paso, where he was setting the Rio Grande on fire with his sensational performances. It is reported that Señor Oliveras is the son of a wealthy Mexican rubber planter, with large estates in Yucatan. He became interested in baseball a few years ago when on a visit to the United States, and, so they say, has shown a most remarkable aptitude for the game.

While he has had many offers to play professional baseball, Señor Oliveras has, up to the present time, declined all advances in that direction. It is understood that this was because of the determined opposition of Oliveras, senior, whose stern family pride caused him to threaten disinheritance should the young man become a professional athlete. The father's consent at last having been obtained, Señor Ramon will appear next spring at the training camp, where his work will be watched with the greatest interest.

He weighs 165 pounds, bats left-handed, and throws right-handed, and is said to be a streak of fire on the bases. Should he come up to expectations—and it must be admitted that Carter is a judge of a ball player—Oliveras will make a welcome addition to Kelly's string. Second base was the weak spot in the infield this season, and many a game slipped through that hole.

Extract from the *Evening Boom*, September 18, 19—:

You must hand it to William Carter, the Human Shovel. His latest feat is the unearthing of a real Mexican baseball player. Bill breezed into the sanctum this morning with a pocketful of Mexican cigars, and, after lighting one, proceeded to go into a trance and tear off the most amazing dream concerning one Ramon d'Enchiladas Olive-

ras, who is, according to Bill's hemp nightmare, the warmest little second baseman that ever wrestled the husk off a tamale, or smothered a platter of frijoles. We have Bill's word for it that Ramon was captured in the wilds of Yucatan, where the chewing gum comes from, and, after a terrible battle with the Mexican customs officers, was dragged over the American line.

Whether it was entirely due to the cigar or not we do not know, not having had the courage to tackle the one which Bill left on the desk, but the Human Shovel says that if Oliveras does not burn up the big league next season, he, Bill, will eat our hat raw.

Dick Kelly could use a second baseman, all right enough, but until we have seen this little brown brother, we refuse to enthuse. Show us, Bill, show us!

(Later.) It couldn't have been the cigar. We tried it, and haven't had any dreams as yet.

It was late in February when the Orphan vanguard arrived at the Arkansas stamping ground—fifteen anxious bushers, under the stern and unbending chaperonage of Richard Kelly and "Mush" McKnight, the old-time catcher, whose duty it was to sift the pitching wheat from the chaff. Some of the new catch had been instructed to report direct at the training camp, among them being the Mexican marvel, Oliveras.

A crafty campaign of publicity, engineered by Kelly, had created a tremendous interest in this unusual recruit, and the newspaper men who arrived with the fledgling leaguers were eaten up with curiosity to see Gumshoe Carter's latest treasure.

On the second day a telegram was handed to Kelly. It read:

I arrive five minutes after two train, this day.
OLIVERAS.

"Well," said Kelly, as he tossed the telegram to the newspaper men, who were loafing in the sun after lunch, "there's some class to this fellow! He sends me a telegram, and, by golly, he prepays the charges! Let's all go down to the train and meet him."

Señor Ramon Oliveras had a large audience waiting for him when he climbed down on the platform at the little station. He wore a black cutaway coat of a strange pattern, light striped trousers, patent-leather shoes, and a stiff hat. The coat was bound at the

edges with braid, and the trousers were quite full below the knee, billowing out at the ankle. He carried two suit cases, a cane, and an umbrella; and at sight of him Dick Kelly's last doubt faded.

"What do you know about that!" he thought. "He's gone and made himself up for the part!"

Señor Oliveras hesitated, and looked about him, as if puzzled. Kelly strode out from the group, and held out his hand.

"Aha!" exclaimed Oliveras, dropping both suit cases, also his cane and umbrella, and removing his hat to show his wavy black hair. "Aha! It mus' be this is the Señor Kelly? *Si!* I greet you, señor! I am please'. I am mos' delighted to meet you!"

To save his life, Kelly could not repress a grin, but he, too, removed his hat, and grasped the hand of Señor Oliveras.

"Put her there!" he said. Then, under his breath: "Bo, you're immense! Immense!"

"The señor will pardon my English," said Oliveras. "I do not yet speak him so good."

"You're doing fine, old top!" said Kelly. "Come and meet the push."

Introductions followed, and to each newspaper correspondent Oliveras made a low bow.

"Yes, yes," he said; "I know what he is—this power of the press. I have in my portmanteau some ver' excellent cigars of my country. We shall be good friends, no?"

"Not no—yes!" said the newspaper men. And they gathered around this most amazing recruit, and plied him with questions. Oliveras answered them all smilingly, showing his white teeth.

"In the firs' place, señores," he said, "I shall not say I am ready to play—ah—the game of my life. That is customary, no? I shall not say that. I mus' only do the best I know. A photograph? I regret I have not any. You have a camera? *Bueno!* Good!"

Then Kelly and Oliveras again clasped hands for the edification of the far-away fans in the home town, and, this formal rite being completed, the

procession started for the hotel, Kelly and the new recruit walking slightly in advance of the others.

"Great stuff!" said Hank Marston, representative of the *Morning Flash-light*. "This fellow will be good for a column a day. It won't have to be the old stuff this year."

"Painfully polite, ain't he?" said Phil Hawes, of the *Evening Boom*. "I wonder if he'll take off his cap before he tags a man out at second?"

"He'll get over that," said Johnny McShane, of the *Daily Breeze*. "All Mexicans are polite—the high-grade ones. And get onto the cut of his clothes! I'll bet they were made in the City of Mexico."

Out in front, Kelly and Oliveras were talking in low tones.

"How 'bout it, Mr. Kelly?" asked Señor Ramon, with a grin. "Did I get by with them newspaper reporters?"

"You bet your life you got by!" said the manager. "Where'd you get it all?"

"Hanging around those Mexican swells at the hotel in El Paso," said the recruit. "Play actin' comes easy to me; I used to be on the stage."

"That's how you happened to dress the part," said Kelly, with a sidewise glance at the cutaway coat.

"Yes, indeedy!" said Oliveras quickly. "That was a right good notion. These rags will cost you forty bucks. A tailor in Juarez made 'em for me out of a ten-year-old fashion plate."

"It's worth it," said Kelly. "And now you listen to me a minute. I'm going to tell you something I don't want you to forget. You can pull all this high-toned Mexican bunk around here that you want to—spring it on the reporters and on the ball players—but don't come any of it with me, savvy? You ain't a Mexican to me, understand?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Kelly, yes, sir," said Oliveras humbly. "But at first I've got to do a certain amount of it to get by. Once I get my spangles on, I won't be actin' no more. I'll be workin' at my trade! Yes, sir, I know my place."

"Keep it, then," said Kelly. "What kind of shape are you in?"

"Fair," said Oliveras. "I been working right along."

When Señor Ramon Oliveras made his first appearance on the field with the other recruits, every newspaper man was present, and the press squad grunted with amazement as the Mexican marvel unlimbered himself.

"Where did he get it? Where did he get it?" said Johnny McShane. "Why, he goes after a ground ball as if he'd never done anything else all his life, and look at the way he whips 'em over to first!"

Oliveras was, indeed, a marvel. Lightning fast on his feet, possessed of two good hands, seeming to field a ball by instinct, and getting it away from him like a flash, he made a tremendous impression upon the manager, as well as upon all others who watched him at work. At batting practice, he stood up to the plate well, choked his bat short, and stepped in with a powerful, choppy swing, and, after a hit, was off for first base like a ten-second man.

By the time the blasé regulars arrived, some of them fat and lazy, others lean and nervous, Oliveras was the sensation of the camp. His bearing when presented to the real big leaguers was charming in its deference, and he fairly took "Scrappy" Kernohan's breath away with his intimate knowledge of that great man's batting record.

"Whatever he is as a ball player," said Scrappy, on his first evening at the camp, "you got to hand it to him for knowing things. Why, he had my record down pat for five years back! Some of the time you can't understand him, of course, but I will say for him that he's a well-read guy!"

After all, ability to play the game is the open sesame to the heart of a professional ball player, and when the regulars had watched Oliveras for a few days they decided that "he belonged," as Harry Watson put it.

"Of course," he qualified, "I don't like them deep brunettes, on principle, but I suppose he's a gentleman in his own country, at that. Last night he was tellin' me all about how they grab rubber out of trees."

Scrappy Kernohan, the center fielder; Frank Browning, the pitcher; Mike Walsh, the first baseman; and "Pickles" Bagby, the shortstop, were first to discover that Señor Oliveras played a very strong and discriminating hand of draw poker; but, oddly enough, Oliveras could not be lured into the crap games. Though they explained the rules of the fascinating pastime many times, and at great length, Oliveras shook his head hopelessly.

"Cards I know a little, *si*," he said deprecatingly; "but these ca-rap game with the dice, I do not understand him."

"Well, if you're going to be a big leaguer," said Bagby, "you'll have to learn. Craps is the ball player's national pastime; didn't you know that?"

"Then I will learn him some day," said Señor Oliveras, "but not now. *Mañana*."

"What is that manyana thing?" demanded Pickles. "You hear it all over down here."

"Oh," said Oliveras, "she mean the same as 'to-morrow.' 'By and by,' no? In Mexico everything it is *mañana*."

But there was no "*mañana*" in the way Señor Ramon played baseball, and the other recruit infielders despaired when they watched him flashing about the keystone sack. When the regulars began their work as a team, Oliveras was dropped into the line-up, and the way he fell in with the working of the seasoned machine gladdened Dick Kelly's heart. Even old Mush McKnight, who had been prophesying a streak of yellow, changed his mind when he saw how Oliveras went after sliding base runners.

"What do you think of him, Mush?" asked Kelly one afternoon, as they were trudging back to the hotel.

"The best second baseman I've seen in a dog's age!" said the old-timer promptly. "If he's got a weakness, I don't know what it is. I was afraid at first he might have a streak, but I've changed my mind. You take my tip, and send Bill Carter down into New Mexico and Arizona; you might find another one like him."

"No," said Kelly, smiling to himself.

"I guess there ain't any more just like him *anywhere*."

"You never can tell," said Mush oracularly.

"I can, if you can't," said Kelly. "But at that he's a wonderful ball player."

The spring camp broke up, as spring camps do, with a grand banquet tendered to the newspaper men, a large amount of oratory, and a prophesying of pennants to come. Señor Ramon Oliveras made the hit of the evening with a speech half in English and half in Spanish, and when he sat down the hotel orchestra—violin, cornet, and piano—rendered the Mexican national air, which was received with unbounded enthusiasm by those upon whom no training regulations had been imposed.

Oliveras departed on the Pullman with the regulars, who were to play their way Northward through Tennessee and Kentucky, meeting various minor-league outfits en route, thus working themselves to a wire edge for the opening of the big-league season on the home grounds. The Mexican marvel was the life of the party. Every city along the line of march was eager to see this wonderful Mexican athlete and to applaud his phenomenal skill.

"He'll be the greatest drawing card of the year," said Johnny McShane to Kelly. "Look at all the press stuff he's had! Every paper in the country has printed something about him. And, oh, what a reception he'll get when he walks up to the plate on opening day! Wow!"

"You've certainly boosted him a lot," said the manager. "Be careful you don't swell his head with that bunk you've been writing about him."

"No danger," said Johnny easily. "He's as modest as any of the rest of these big-league stars. Why, last night he came into the smoking compartment of the Pullman and showed me a lot of clippings of my stuff in the *Breeze*, and he's going to send them down to his old man in Yucatan. He said those write-ups would make his old father very happy and proud."

"He did, eh?" demanded Kelly, with

a sudden snort. "Now, wouldn't that rattle your teeth! His old man in Yucatan! Well, I've got to hand it to him. He is a marvel!"

Mr. McShane agreed with the manager's spoken word, if not with his innermost thoughts.

Now, it is a sad thing to reflect that if Kelly had not made arrangements to play a certain game in a Tennessee town—the gate receipts were less than four hundred dollars—there might have been a happier ending to this story. But for this we might have followed Señor Ramon Oliveras to his triumph on the opening day; we might even have heard twenty thousand voices uplifted in a welcome to the Mexican marvel; but the future is something which even a big-league manager may not see, and the past whispers no warning of the tragedy another sunrise may bring.

To Dick Kelly, sprawled upon two seats in the Pullman, lazily watching the panorama of the Great Smoky Mountains sliding by in the distance, there came no faint foreboding of disaster. To Señor Ramon Oliveras, holding three queens, and triumphantly boasting Pickles Bagby's bobtail flush, came not the slightest shadow of fast-approaching events.

It would be pleasing to make a wide detour around the town of Kirbyville—it is not on the map, though the name sounds well—but truth is better than fiction, and cheaper, as all magazine editors know, so there remains nothing but to hasten on to the final chapter and the closing scene in the career of the fated Oliveras.

The Orphans arrived in Kirbyville at eleven o'clock in the morning, and were driven to the hotel—a rambling wooden structure of the sort so common among Southern hostelries. As the ball players alighted from the bus, a sturdy young mulatto who was waiting to help with the baggage caught sight of the Mexican marvel, whereupon the mulatto started slightly, and his mouth fell open to such an extent that he seemed in danger of losing his chin altogether.

Dick Kelly registered the members of his party, and the athletes scattered in

all directions. Pickles Bagby and Oliveras went out to purchase copies of the home papers, if so be any were to be found in the town; Kelly busied himself with a heavy mail and a packet of telegrams.

The mulatto edged over to the desk, and began an intricate study of the names upon the hotel register, spelling them out a letter at a time.

"You, Joe!" said the man behind the desk. "How many times have I told you not to be foolin' around here?"

"Yaas, suh, kunnel," said the mulatto, "yaas, suh. Ah was aimin' to fin' out the name of that dark-complected gen'elman, kunnel."

Colonel Randolph, the proprietor of the hotel, was a very tall, erect old gentleman of the type instantly recognized North, East, and West as a Southerner. His gray hair, worn rather long, was tossed carelessly back from a high forehead; his mustache and goatee were snow white. His eyes, black and piercing, looked out from deep, furrowed pits on either side of an eagle beak of a nose, and there were baggy wrinkles in his thin cheeks. Among other things, the colonel wore a long gray frock coat, a turndown collar, a black string tie, and had one been impudent enough to lean over the counter it might have been observed that the old gentleman still clung to the neat custom-made boot of the sixties.

"A dark gentleman, Joe?" repeated the colonel, glancing at the book. "Oh, yes. 'Señor R. Oliveras.' Spania'd, mos' likely."

"Thank yo', kunnel," said Joe, moving away. "Thank yo'."

Later Joe, the mulatto, was observed in excited conversation with a tall, solemn-faced negro, clad in the abbreviated black alpaca jacket and white apron of a waiter.

"It *is* him, Ah'm a-tellin' yo'!" said Joe vehemently. "Ah was as clost to him as Ah am to you, Pete. Got him registered as Olie-varies, an' the kunnel he thinks he's Spanish, but thass ole Bud Buckner, or Ah'm bline!"

"G'way, boy!" said the solemn-faced negro loftily. "You-all been a-hittin'

that ole gin bottle too strong lately. Yo' seein' things."

"Don't Ah *knows* him?" demanded Joe, fairly dancing in his excitement. "Wouldn't Ah know that coon a mile off? Ah tell yo', Pete, Ah like to drop down *dead* when he come a-climbin' outeren that bus 'long with them white folks. Ole Bud cert'nly handed me a jolt that time."

"Keep a-movin', boy, keep a-movin'," said Pete sternly. "Don't be a-standin' here wavin' yo' hands thataway. Yo' talkin' whut ain't possible nohow. Yo' full of gin, Joe, thass whut ail *you*. Why don't you-all wait fo' the cool of the evenin' to git tight?"

"Ain't had no drink to-day!" protested Joe. "You' jus' wait, an' yo'll see him fo' yo'se'f. He'll be in here to lunch d'rectly."

"Ah won' see him th'ough no gin bottle, Ah tell yo' those!" said the solemn-faced negro. "Listen! The ol' kunnel done ringin' fo' yo' now."

Joe darted away on an errand, and the tall negro returned to his position near the door of the dining room, where he leaned up against a post and scratched his chin meditatively.

"Ah wisht it *wuz* him, dog-gone his ornery hide!" said Pete to himself. "Done touched me fo' fifty bones 'count o' that inflammatory rheumatism, an' never kicked back no paht of it."

The first visitors into the dining room were the newspaper men. A long table had been prepared for the ball players, but Hank Marston, who was the official lady killer of the party, elected to take nourishment at a table near the window, where he could look out into the street. The tall negro slid his feet across the floor, and came to rest with his head cocked on one side, like an inquisitive raven. Hank glanced at the card, tossed it aside, and nodded to Hawes and McShane.

"The best in the house, George!" said Hank; and Pete bowed gravely, all negro waiters answering to "George," just as all German waiters recognize "Emil," and all French waiters "Alphonse."

"Yas, suh," said he. "Yo' cert'ny kin have it."

Then he glided from the room, and the swinging doors closed behind him.

The ball players, anxious to get their meal over as soon as possible, began to straggle into the dining room, and other waiters attended to their wants. Last of all came Oliveras and Pickles Bagby. Dick Kelly did not put in an appearance. He was down at the telegraph office.

The young mulatto known as Joe appeared in the door of the dining room for an instant, and then withdrew, mumbling.

"Eatin' with *white* folks!" he muttered. "M-m-m-m-ff! That nigger cert'ny a-flyin' high an' a-spreadin' hisse'f wide! How he kin get away with it beats me!"

At this juncture the solemn-faced Pete came sliding in from the kitchen, an immense tray balanced upon his outspread fingers. After Pete had served the newspaper men with soup, he found time to glance about the room.

Almost immediately his roving eye fell upon the unsuspecting Oliveras, who was laughing at Pickles Bagby's comments upon the natives of Kirbyville. The sight of Señor Oliveras affected Pete powerfully. One might almost have suspected that he had stepped upon a live wire. His tall frame stiffened, his nostrils widened, and his eyelids fluttered. After some time, he cautiously changed his position, moving to another spot, where a better view was possible. Then Pete's chin began to sag, and his eyes opened until they seemed about to pop out of his head.

"*Faw de Lawd's sake!*" he whispered, in the tone of one who sees a ghost. Thereafter Pete was a black statue, only the agitated blinking of his eyelids betraying life and indicating deep emotion. How long he might have remained thus hypnotized is not known, for the impatient clatter of spoons recalled him to his senses and his duty.

"Fish? Yas, suh. It's comin' right up, suh."

Pete skated from the room, and in a surprisingly short space of time was back again at the table.

"Fresh this mawnin', suh," he said. "Right f'um the creek."

He served the fish with hands which trembled slightly, and, this duty performed, he presumed so far as to ask a question.

"Ah ast yo' indulgence, gen'lemen," he said solemnly, "but Ah thought maybe yo' could be so kin' an' condescendin' as to denominate to me whut is the name of that dark-completed gen'elman over at yonder table?"

"George," said Johnny McShane, "I'm surprised at your ignorance. You amaze me. That is the great and only Señor Ramon Oliveras."

"Yas, suh," said Pete, with a chastened air; "so Ah been infawmed. Ah jus' desiahed to be identified to the gen'elman, thass all. Is he—a-ball playeh, or is he jus' travelin' with the club fo' his health?"

"You can bet he's a ball player!" said McShane. "He's the greatest second baseman that ever pulled on a glove. Take another look at him, so you won't forget him."

"Yas, suh," said Pete, with a strange emphasis, "ah been a-lookin' right *at* him fo' quite some time."

"George," said Marston, "saunter out there to the kitchen on those large flat feet of yours, and round up some of that fried chicken. White meat mostly."

"Yas, suh," said Pete, as he glided away once more. But this time his eyes were closed to threatening slits, and there was a savage promise in the set of his chin. The sag had gone out of it, for Pete was planning a surprise party for Señor Ramon Oliveras. As it happened, Joe's busy tongue saved him the trouble.

After being repulsed by Pete, Joe found a sympathetic listener in Napoleon, the head porter, who gave a wide ear to Joe's startling tale.

"An' Ah ain' guessin'," said the mulatto. "Thass ole Bud Buckner, an' Ah could take a par'lyzed oath to it!"

"Great kingdom come!" said Napoleon. "He betteh not let the ol' kunnel ketch him a-settin' in the dinin' room. The kunnel is quality folks f'um *w-a-a-y* back yonder, an' pow'ful hard-headed."

He'd think this Olly-whut's-his-name had done put the hoodoo on the hotel fo' shore. Don' let the kunnel fin' it out, or he'll just 'bout bust this bogus Mexican wit' the big end o'-that ol' smoke wagon whut he keep fo' special 'casions. Thass whut'll happen to *him*!"

And then, quite naturally, the porter promptly told the chambermaid on the second floor, and the chambermaid told the housekeeper, Mrs. Elvira Jackson, who was a white woman—and Mrs. Jackson immediately rushed downstairs, and breathlessly broke the terrible news to Colonel Randolph, whereupon the wheel of events began to spin at amazing speed.

"What's this I hear?" cried Mrs. Jackson. "What's this? A nigger sittin' in the dinin' room with those good-for-nothin' ball players? Colonel Randolph, I must say I'm surprised at you!"

The colonel, who had been doing a little single-entry bookkeeping, removed his glasses, laid down his pen, and rose to his full height—six feet two inches of Southern indignation.

"A niggah, Mrs. Jackson?" he exclaimed. "A niggah registered in my house, an' a-sittin' in my dinin' room? Who says so, ma'am?"

"All the help knows it," said the housekeeper excitedly. "An' goodness only knows how many more. Joe recognized him when he came in with the rest of these ball players this mawnin'. He used to play ball with Joe and Pete befo' they came here."

Colonel Randolph slammed the call bell violently.

"Send that black boy Joe here to me!" he ordered.

In less than thirty seconds Joe appeared, scared almost white.

"Now, boy, what's this I hear about a niggah eatin' in my dinin' room?" demanded the colonel sternly. "That Oliveras—did you ever see him befo'?"

"Yaas, suh; yaas, suh," said Joe, his teeth chattering. "'Deed, Ah has seed him befo'! He ain' no Spania'd, kunnel, no mo'n Ah am. He's *black*, thass whut he is—*black*! Ah knowed him when he was goin' by name o' Bud Buckner, an' Ah played baseball on the

same team with him, suh. *Pete*, he'd know him, too. His name's Buckner, an' he comes f'um—"

"Shut up!" said Colonel Randolph. "If you knew he was a niggah, why didn't you tell me, so's I could 'a' had him booted out in the street where he belongs?"

"Kunnel, Ah wasn' quite shore at first, till Ah got a good look at him. *Then Ah knowed him!*" Joe was lying desperately. "If that ain' so, Kunnel Randolph, Ah hopes somebody'll shoot me!"

"Somebody *will* one of these days," said the colonel grimly. "Come 'long with me, boy. I may want you to identify the black scoundrel."

Colonel Randolph opened a drawer, and, taking out an immense old-fashioned pistol of the vintage of a far year, tucked it into the deep pocket which a tailor, familiar with Kirbyville custom, had accommodatingly located over the right hip.

"Come along now!" said the colonel; and Joe followed, moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

At the long table in the center of the dining room the ball players were expressing their opinions of Southern hotels and Southern hotel service with the freedom from restraint which marks the attitude of the big leaguer who travels much, sleeps soft, and eats sweet.

"How do these bum houses compare with your Mexican hotels, Ollie?" asked Mike Walsh.

"Ah-h!" said Oliveras. "Mexico, she has not the good hotel like this great country. Of course, if you are entertain' by some reech gentleman at his hacienda—very good. *Bueno!* Everythin'-ng he is cook' with the chili pepper, an' is ver' hot so as to burn the mouth. The frijole, which is the brown bean, he is good. The enchilada—good, if you like him; but the real chicken tamale, ah-h!" Señor Oliveras kissed the tips of his fingers, and tossed them in the air with a gesture more expressive than words. "But the hotel of Mexico, I could not recommend him to you, because—"

A cool, drawling voice cut through the

soft flow of Señor Oliveras' remarks as a sharp knife cuts through Camembert cheese. It was a voice low-pitched, with intent to carry no farther than the table at which the ball players were sitting; but there was about it the same vibrant quality which one hears in the rattle-snake's warning. It carried with it a distinct menace.

"I am infawmed," it said, "that there is a niggah sittin' at this table in my hotel. I desiah to know if this be true."

There were fifteen men at that table. Fourteen of them looked up in blank amazement. Colonel Randolph stood, tall and straight, at the end of the board. Not a muscle of his face twitched, but his eyes shot fire. Behind him was the mulatto Joe, his face the color of cigarette ashes. Oliveras did not look up; the tinkle of the fork as it slipped from his fingers was the only sound in the brief silence which followed the colonel's last words. There was a furtive shifting of his eyes; he saw only the skirt of the gray frock coat, but that was enough.

Colonel Randolph did not look at the subject of his remarks, but rather examined the white faces which were turned toward him. If ever a man read honest bewilderment, not unmixed with indignation, the colonel read it then—and understood.

Frank Browning, the pitcher, was first to find his tongue.

"You—what?" he exclaimed.

"Gentlemen," said the colonel, "I have no wish to be a'b'rary in this unfawtunate situation, but I have been imposed upon; my hospitality has been flagrantly abused. This is the man here!" The colonel leveled a long, skinny forefinger at Oliveras. "He may claim to be a Spania'd, gentlemen, and as such you have associated with him, bein' No'therners, and—"

"Spaniard nothing!" stuttered Pickles Bagby, interrupting the colonel's remarks. "He's a Mexican!"

"Spania'd or Mexican," said the colonel sternly, "it makes no difference to me. I say he's a niggah, gentlemen—a niggah!"

The ball players broke into violent protestations.

"Why, he's drunk!" said Scrappy Kernohan. "Stewed as an owl!"

"Don't pay any attention to the old guy, Ollie," said Mike Walsh. "He's off his nut."

"Take a punch at him," whispered Pickles Bagby. "Knock his block off!"

"Shut up, fellows!" said Browning. "Let's get this straightened out. Now, sir," addressing the colonel, "I don't know where you got your information, but certainly there must be some mistake—"

"I assure you there is a mistake, suh," said the colonel, and again the vibrant quality crept into his tone, commanding silence; "but you are the ones who are making it. *Look* at him, gentlemen! Can't you *see* what he is?"

The Mexican marvel sat huddled in his chair. Never once had he raised his eyes as far as the colonel's face, nor had he spoken a word.

"That should be sufficient," said Colonel Randolph quietly; "but should you desiah fu'ther proof, I am prepa'ed to furnish it. *Joe!*"

"Yaas, suh, kunnel," quavered the mulatto. "Ah's right here, suh."

"Where have you seen this man befo'?" demanded the colonel, in the manner of a cross-examiner. "Speak up an' tell these gentlemen."

"Ah seen him—a lots o' places," said Joe, plucking up courage in the shadow of the rigid gray figure. "Him 'n' me, we played ball togetheh with the Af'o-'Merican Stars. He went under the name o' Buckner then—*Bud* Buckner was whut Ah knowed him by, an' he come f'um down in Georgy—"

There was a crash as of a falling tray, and the solemn-faced Pete appeared on the other side of Colonel Randolph, demanding that his testimony be taken.

"Ast me whut Ah knows!" cried Pete. "Ast me, Kunnel Randolph. Ah was first baseman on that same ole club. Two years Ah knowed this Bud Buckner—an' never knowed no-o good of him, neither! Ah knows him yet—fifty dolleh's wuth whut he touch' me fo'

when he quit the club las' July in Bellefontaine, *Ohio*, an' Ah alwuz says that straight hair o' his would git him in trouble—”

“That'll do, Pete!” said the colonel.

“Kunnel, jus' one mo' word!” pleaded Pete. “An kin prove it right here how well Ah knows this coon. All these gen'elmen seen him stripped in the dressin' room. *Well*, then,” Pete appealed directly to the ball players, “yo' kin tell me whether he's got two scars on his lef' arm below the elbow. Am Ah right, gen'elmen? An' Ah knows where he *got* them scars, too! He got um down on the levee at Memphis, in a ra-azor ruction, thass where he got them marks. Hadn't been fo' me, they'd ha' cut his fool head off that night. An' then he beats me out o' fifty—”

“Shut up!” said the colonel.

The ball players exchanged startled glances; then they turned as one man to the late Señor Ramon Oliveras. Pete had, indeed, clinched the case against the Mexican marvel. Every one of the men had seen the scars—Oliveras had explained them as trifling souvenirs of a love affair in Valladolid. To the Orphans the chain of evidence was complete to the last damning link. If anything more were needed, the cringing attitude of the culprit supplied it. A nasty growl ran around the table; some of the players pushed back their chairs. There was a threat of violence in the very air. Colonel Randolph's voice checked the gathering storm:

“I do not know who is responsible for this—this outrage upon Southern feeling, gentlemen. If I knew, he should answer to me—to *me*. A niggah in my hotel, passin' himse'f off as a *Mexican*, an' creatin' a scandal in a decent community! But I *do* know one thing!” Again the deadly menace backed up the low-spoken words as they fell one by one, cold and threatening. “*If this man is on my premises thirty seconds from now—*” Colonel Randolph paused

significantly, and reached back under the skirt of his long-tailed coat.

Out of the corner of one eye, Bud Buckner caught and interpreted the motion of the gray sleeve—he was always good at catching “signs,” was Bud. For three terrible, choking seconds he hesitated; then his chair crashed backward to the floor. It was in Bud's mind to depart through the door, thus making as graceful an exit as possible under painful circumstances; but once on his feet there came to him a swift realization of what manner of man stood between him and the door, with one hand under the skirt of his gray coat. Southern gentlemen have been known, out of the pure exuberance of feeling, to risk a wing shot, and this Bud knew, so he passed out through the nearest window, taking the sash with him.

For an instant there was a stunned silence, and then Pete's accusing voice speeded the parting guest:

“Thar goes my fifty bucks! Run, yo' wolf, *run!* Yo' may be a Mexican up No'th, but yo' up against the *real* thing down here!”

Thus passed, with a jingling window sash about his neck, and many conflicting emotions in his soul, Señor Ramon Oliveras from the roster of a big-league ball club.

When Dick Kelly returned from the telegraph office, Colonel Randolph was disposed to be very stiff with him, but when the good old gentleman learned how grossly Mr. Kelly had been deceived he forgave him everything—and opened a bottle of venerable port.

“I appreciate yo' feelings, suh,” said the colonel, lifting his glass. “Any gentleman will. My rega'ds, suh!”

As for poor old Gumshoe Bill Carter, unanimously elected the goat, he is still explaining; and to mention Mexico in the presence of a certain ball club is exactly the same thing as reserving a cot in the emergency ward of the nearest hospital.

A very mysterious “BLACK BOOK” figured prominently in the outfit of a star ball player, and it was responsible for a lot of trouble. You'll hear about it in Van Loan's next yarn—in the September Month-end POPULAR, on sale August 23rd.

The Thinking Machine

By Jacques Futrelle

Author of "The Diamond Master," "The Thinking Machine on the Case," Etc.

III.—THE CASE OF THE SCIENTIFIC MURDERER

CERTAINLY no problem that ever came to the attention of The Thinking Machine required in a greater degree subtlety of mind, exquisite analytical sense, and precise knowledge of the marvels of science than did that singular series of events which began with the death of the Honorable Violet Danbury, only daughter and sole heir of the late Sir Duval Danbury, of Leamington, England. In this case The Thinking Machine—more properly, Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, Ph. D., M. D., F. R. S., et cetera, et cetera—brought to bear upon an extraordinary mystery of crime that intangible genius of logic which had made him the court of last appeal in his profession. "Logic is inexorable," he has said; and no greater proof of his assertion was possible than in this instance where literally he seemed to pluck a solution of the riddle from the void.

Shortly after eleven o'clock on the morning of Thursday, May 4, Miss Danbury was found dead, sitting in the drawing-room of apartments she was temporarily occupying in a big family hotel on Beacon Street. She was richly gowned, just as she had come from the opera the night before; her marble-white bosom and arms aglitter with jewels. On her face, dark in death as are the faces of those who die of strangulation, was an expression of unspeakable terror. Her parted lips were slightly bruised, as if from a light blow; in her left cheek was an insignificant, bloodless wound. On the floor at her feet was a shattered goblet. There was

nothing else unusual, no disorder, no sign of a struggle. Obviously she had been dead for several hours.

All these things considered, the snap judgment of the police—specifically, the snap judgment of Detective Mallory, of the bureau of criminal investigation—was suicide by poison. Miss Danbury had poured some deadly drug into a goblet, sat down, drained it off, and died. Simple and obvious enough. But the darkness in her face? Oh, that! Probably some effect of a poison he didn't happen to be acquainted with. But it looked as if she might have been strangled! Pooh! Pooh! There were no marks on her neck, of fingers or anything else. Suicide, that's what it was—the autopsy would disclose the nature of the poison.

Cursory questions of the usual nature were asked and answered. Had Miss Danbury lived alone? No; she had a companion upon whom, too, devolved the duties of chaperon—a Mrs. Cecelia Montgomery. Where was she? She'd left the city the day before to visit friends in Concord; the manager of the hotel had telegraphed the facts to her. No servants? No. She had availed herself of the service in the hotel. Who had last seen Miss Danbury alive? The elevator attendant the night before, when she had returned from the opera, about half past eleven o'clock. Had she gone alone? No. She had been accompanied by Professor Charles Meredith, of the university. He had returned with her, and left her at the elevator.

"How did she come to know Profes-

sor Meredith?" Mallory inquired.
"Friend, relative—"

"I don't know," said the hotel manager. "She knew a great many people here. She'd only been in the city two months this time, but once, three years ago, she spent six months here."

"Any particular reason for her coming over? Business, for instance, or merely a visit?"

"Merely a visit, I imagine."

The front door swung open, and there entered at the moment a middle-aged man, sharp-featured, rather spare, brisk in his movements, and distinctly well groomed. He went straight to the inquiry desk.

"Will you please phone to Miss Danbury, and ask her if she will join Mr. Herbert Willing for luncheon at the country club?" he requested. "Tell her I am below with my motor."

At mention of Miss Danbury's name both Mallory and the house manager turned. The boy behind the inquiry desk glanced at the detective blankly. Mr. Willing rapped upon the desk sharply.

"Well, well?" he demanded impatiently. "Are you asleep?"

"Good morning, Mr. Willing," Mallory greeted him.

"Hello, Mallory," and Mr. Willing turned to face him. "What are you doing here?"

"You don't know that Miss Danbury is"—the detective paused a little—"is dead?"

"Dead!" Mr. Willing gasped. "Dead!" he repeated incredulously. "What are you talking about?" He seized Mallory by the arm, and shook him. "Miss Danbury is—"

"Dead," the detective assured him again. "She probably committed suicide. She was found in her apartments two hours ago."

For half a minute Mr. Willing continued to stare at him as if without comprehension, then he dropped weakly into a chair, with his head in his hands. When he glanced up again there was deep grief in his keen face.

"It's my fault," he said simply. "I feel like a murderer. I gave her some

bad news yesterday, but I didn't dream she would—" He stopped.

"Bad news?" Mallory urged.

"I've been doing some legal work for her," Mr. Willing explained. "She's been trying to sell a huge estate in England, and just at the moment the deal seemed assured it fell through. I—I suppose it was a mistake to tell her. This morning I received another offer from an unexpected quarter, and I came by to inform her of it." He stared tensely into Mallory's face for a moment without speaking. "I feel like her murderer!" he said again.

"But I don't understand why the failure of the deal—" the detective began; then: "She was rich, wasn't she? What did it matter particularly if the deal did fail?"

"Rich, yes; but land poor," the lawyer elucidated. "The estates to which she held title were frightfully involved. She had jewels and all those things, but see how simply she lived. She was actually in need of money. It would take me an hour to make you understand. How did she die? When? What was the manner of her death?"

Detective Mallory placed before him those facts he had, and finally went away with him in his motor car to see Professor Meredith at the university. Nothing bearing on the case developed as the result of that interview. Mr. Meredith seemed greatly shocked, and explained that his acquaintance with Miss Danbury dated some weeks back, and friendship had grown out of it through a mutual love of music. He had accompanied her to the opera half a dozen times.

"Suicide!" the detective declared, as he came away. "Obviously suicide by poison."

On the following day he discovered for the first time that the obvious is not necessarily true. The autopsy revealed absolutely no trace of poison, either in the body or clinging to the shattered goblet, carefully gathered up and examined. The heart was normal, showing neither constriction nor dilation, as would have been the case had poison been swallowed, or even inhaled.

"It's the small wound in her cheek, then," Mallory asserted. "Maybe she didn't swallow or inhale poison—she injected it directly into her blood through that wound."

"No," one of the examining physicians pointed out. "Even that way the heart would have shown constriction or dilation."

"Oh, maybe not," Mallory argued hopefully.

"Besides," the physician went on, "that wound was made after death. That is proven by the fact that it did not bleed." His brow clouded in perplexity. "There doesn't seem to be the slightest reason for that wound, anyway. It's really a hole, you know. It goes straight through her cheek. It looks as if it might have been made with a large hatpin."

The detective was staring at him. If that wound had been made after death, certainly Miss Danbury didn't make it—she had been murdered! And not murdered for robbery, since her jewels had been undisturbed.

"Straight through her cheek!" he repeated blankly. "By George! Say, if it wasn't poison, what killed her?"

The three examining physicians exchanged glances.

"I don't know that I can make you understand," said one. "She died of absence of air in her lungs, if you follow me."

"Absence of air—well, that's illuminating!" the detective sneered heavily. "You mean she was strangled, or choked to death?"

"I mean precisely what I say," was the reply. "She was not strangled—there is no mark on her throat; or choked—there is no obstruction in her throat. Literally she died of absence of air in her lungs."

Mallory stood silently glowering at them. A fine lot of physicians, these!

"Let's understand one another," he said at last. "Miss Danbury did not die a natural death?"

"No!" emphatically.

"She wasn't poisoned? Or strangled? Or shot? Or stabbed? Or run over by a truck? Or blown up by dy-

namite? Or kicked by a mule? Nor," he concluded, "did she fall from an aeroplane?"

"No."

"In other words, she just quit living?"

"Something like that," the physician admitted. He seemed to be seeking a means of making himself more explicit. "You know the old nursery theory that a cat will suck a sleeping baby's breath?" he asked. "Well, the death of Miss Danbury was like that, if you understand. It is as if some great animal or—or thing had—" He stopped.

Detective Mallory was an able man, the ablest, perhaps, in the bureau of criminal investigation, but a yellow primrose by the river's brim was to him a yellow primrose, nothing more. He lacked imagination, a common fault of that type of sleuth who combines, more or less happily, a number eleven shoe and a number six hat. The only vital thing he had to go on was the fact that Miss Danbury was dead—murdered, in some mysterious, uncanny way. Vampires were something like that, weren't they? He shuddered a little.

"Regular vampire sort of thing," the youngest of the three physicians remarked, echoing the thought in the detective's mind. "They're supposed to make a slight wound, and—"

Detective Mallory didn't hear the remainder of it. He turned abruptly, and left the room.

On the following Monday morning, one Henry Sumner, a longshoreman in Atlantic Avenue, was found dead sitting in his squalid room. On his face, dark in death, as are the faces of those who die of strangulation, was an expression of unspeakable terror. His parted lips were slightly bruised, as if from a light blow; in his left cheek was an insignificant, bloodless wound. On the floor at his feet was a shattered drinking glass!

'Twas Hutchinson Hatch, newspaper reporter, long, lean, and rather prepossessing in appearance, who brought this double mystery to the attention of The Thinking Machine. Martha, the eminent scientist's one servant, admitted the

newspaper man, and he went straight to the laboratory. As he opened the door The Thinking Machine turned testily from his worktable.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Hatch. Glad to see you. Sit down. What is it?" That was his idea of extreme cordiality.

"If you can spare me five minutes?" the reporter began apologetically.

"What is it?" repeated The Thinking Machine, without raising his eyes.

"I wish I knew," the reporter said ruefully. "Two persons are dead—two persons as widely apart as the poles, at least in social position, have been murdered in precisely the same manner, and it seems impossible that—"

"Nothing is impossible," The Thinking Machine interrupted, in the tone of perpetual irritation which seemed to be a part of him. "You annoy me when you say it."

"It seems highly improbable," Hatch corrected himself, "that there can be the remotest connection between the crimes, yet—"

"You're wasting words," the crabbed little scientist declared impatiently. "Begin at the beginning. Who was murdered? When? How? Why? What was the manner of death?"

"Taking the last question first," the reporter explained, "we have the most singular part of the problem. No one can say the manner of death, not even the physicians."

"Oh!" For the first time The Thinking Machine lifted his petulant, squinting, narrowed eyes, and stared into the face of the newspaper man. "Oh!" he said again. "Go on."

As Hatch talked, the lure of a material problem laid hold of the master mind, and after a little The Thinking Machine dropped into a chair. With his great, grotesque head tilted back, his eyes turned steadily upward, and slender fingers placed precisely tip to tip, he listened in silence to the end.

"We come now," said the newspaper man, "to the inexplicable after developments. We have proven that Mrs. Cecelia Montgomery, Miss Danbury's companion, did *not* go to Concord to visit friends; as a matter of fact, she is

missing. The police have been able to find no trace of her, and to-day are sending out a general alarm. Naturally, her absence at this particular moment is suspicious. It is possible to conjecture her connection with the death of Miss Danbury, but what about—"

"Never mind conjecture," the scientist broke in curtly. "Facts, facts!"

"Further," and Hatch's bewilderment was evident on his face, "mysterious things have been happening in the rooms where Miss Danbury and this man Henry Sumner were found dead. Miss Danbury was found dead last Thursday. Immediately after the body was removed, Detective Mallory ordered her room locked, his idea being that nothing should be disturbed at least for the present, because of the strange circumstances surrounding her death. When the nature of the Henry Sumner affair became known, and the similarity of the cases recognized, he gave the same order regarding Sumner's room."

Hatch stopped, and stared vainly into the pallid, wizened face of the scientist. A curious little chill ran down his spinal column.

"Some time Tuesday night," he continued, after a moment, "Miss Danbury's room was entered and ransacked; and some time that same night Henry Sumner's room was entered and ransacked. This morning, Wednesday, a clearly defined hand print in blood was found in Miss Danbury's room. It was on the wooden top of a dressing table. It seemed to be a woman's hand. Also, an indistinguishable smudge of blood, which may have been a hand print, was found in Sumner's room!" He paused; The Thinking Machine's countenance was inscrutable. "What possible connection can there be between this young woman of the aristocracy, and this—this longshoreman? Why should—"

"What chair," questioned The Thinking Machine, "does Professor Meredith hold in the university?"

"Greek," was the reply.

"Who is Mr. Willing?"

"One of the leading lawyers of the city."

"Did you see Miss Danbury's body?"

"Yes."

"Did she have a large mouth, or a small mouth?"

The irrelevancy of the questions, to say nothing of their disjointedness, brought a look of astonishment to Hatch's face; and he was a young man who was rarely astonished by the curious methods of The Thinking Machine. Always he had found that the scientist approached a problem from a new angle.

"I should say a small mouth," he ventured. "Her lips were bruised as if—as if something round, say the size of a twenty-five-cent piece, had been crushed against them. There was a queer, drawn, caved-in look to her mouth and cheeks."

"Naturally," commented The Thinking Machine enigmatically. "And Sumner's was the same?"

"Precisely. You say 'naturally.' Do you mean—" There was eagerness in the reporter's question.

It passed unanswered. For half a minute The Thinking Machine continued to stare into nothingness. Finally:

"I dare say Sumner was of the English type? His name is English?"

"Yes; a splendid physical man, a hard drinker, I hear, as well as a hard worker."

Again a pause.

"You don't happen to know if Professor Meredith is now or ever has been particularly interested in physics—that is, in natural philosophy?"

"I do not."

"Please find out immediately," the scientist directed tersely. "Willing has handled some legal business for Miss Danbury. Learn what you can from him to the general end of establishing some connection, a relationship possibly, between Henry Sumner and the Honorable Violet Danbury. That, at the moment, is the most important thing to do. Neither of them may have been aware of the relationship, if relationship it was, yet it may have existed. If it doesn't exist, there's only one answer to the problem."

"And that is?" Hatch asked.

"The murders are the work of a madman," was the tart rejoinder. "There's no mystery, of course, in the manner of the deaths of these two."

"No mystery?" the reporter echoed blankly. "Do you mean you know how they—"

"Certainly I know, and you know. The examining physicians know, only they don't know that they know." Suddenly his tone became didactic. "Knowledge that can't be applied is utterly useless," he said. "The real difference between a great mind and a mediocre mind is only that the great mind applies its knowledge." He was silent a moment. "The only problem remaining here is to find the person who was aware of the many advantages of this method of murder."

"Advantages?" Hatch was puzzled.

"From the viewpoint of the murderer there is always a good way and a bad way to kill a person," the scientist told him. "This particular murderer chose a way that was swift, silent, simple, and sure as the march of time. There was no scream, no struggle, no pistol shot, no poison to be traced, nothing to be seen except—"

"The hole in the left cheek, perhaps?"

"Quite right, and that leaves no clew. As a matter of fact, the only clew we have at all is the certainty that the murderer, man or woman, is well acquainted with physics, or natural philosophy."

"Then you think," the newspaper man's eyes were about to start from his head, "that Professor Meredith—"

"I think nothing," The Thinking Machine declared briefly. "I want to know what he knows of physics, as I said; also I want to know if there is any connection between Miss Danbury and the longshoreman. If you'll attend to—"

Abruptly the laboratory door opened and Martha entered, pallid, frightened, her hands shaking.

"Something most peculiar, sir," she stammered in her excitement.

"Well?" the little scientist questioned.

"I do believe," said Martha, "that I'm a-going to faint!"

And as an evidence of good faith she did, crumpling up in a little heap before their astonished eyes.

"Dear me! Dear me!" exclaimed The Thinking Machine petulantly. "Of all the inconsiderate things! Why couldn't she have told us before she did that?"

It was a labor of fifteen minutes to bring Martha around, and then weakly she explained what had happened. She had answered a ring of the telephone, and some one had asked for Professor Van Dusen. She inquired the name of the person talking.

"Never mind that," came the reply. "Is he there? Can I see him?"

"You'll have to explain what you want, sir," Martha had told him. "He always has to know."

"Tell him I know who murdered Miss Danbury and Henry Sumner," came over the wire. "If he'll receive me I'll be right up."

"And then, sir," Martha explained to The Thinking Machine, "something must have happened at the other end, sir. I heard another man's voice, then a sort of a choking sound, sir, and then they cursed me, sir. I didn't hear any more. They hung up the receiver or something, sir." She paused indignantly. "Think of him, sir, a-swearing at me!"

For a moment the eyes of the two men met; the same thought had come to them both. The Thinking Machine voiced it.

"Another one!" he said. "The third!"

With no other word he turned and went out; Martha followed him grumbly. Hatch shuddered a little. The hand of the clock went on to half past seven, to eight. At twenty minutes past eight the scientist reentered the laboratory.

"That fifteen minutes Martha was unconscious probably cost a man's life, and certainly lost to us an immediate solution of the riddle," he declared peevishly. "If she had told us before she fainted there is a chance that the operator would have remembered the number. As it is, there have been fifty calls

since, and there's no record." He spread his slender hands helplessly. "The manager is trying to find the calling number. Anyway, we'll know to-morrow. Meanwhile, try to see Mr. Willing to-night, and find out about what relationship, if any, exists between Miss Danbury and Sumner; also, see Professor Meredith."

The newspaper man telephoned to Mr. Willing's home in Melrose to see if he was in; he was not. On a chance he telephoned to his office. He hardly expected an answer, and he got none. So it was not until four o'clock in the morning that the third tragedy in the series came to light.

The scrubwomen employed in the great building where Mr. Willing had his law offices entered the suite to clean up. They found Mr. Willing there, gagged, bound hand and foot, and securely lashed to a chair. He was alive, but apparently unconscious from exhaustion. Directly facing him his secretary, Maxwell Pittman, sat dead in his chair. On his face, dark in death, as are the faces of those who die of strangulation, was an expression of unspeakable terror. His parted lips were slightly bruised, as if from a light blow; in his left cheek was an insignificant, bloodless wound!

Within an hour Detective Mallory was on the scene. By that time Mr. Willing, under the influence of stimulants, was able to talk.

"I have no idea what happened," he explained. "It was after six o'clock, and my secretary and I were alone in the offices, finishing up some work. He had stepped into another room for a moment, and I was at my desk. Some one crept up behind me, and held a drugged cloth to my nostrils. I tried to shout, and struggled, but everything grew black, and that's all I know. When I came to myself poor Pittman was there, just as you see him."

Snooping about the offices, Mallory came upon a small lace handkerchief. He seized upon it tensely, and as he raised it to examine it he became conscious of a strong odor of drugs. In one corner of the handkerchief there was a monogram.

"C. M.," he read; his eyes blazed. "Cecelia Montgomery!"

In the grip of an uncontrollable excitement Hutchinson Hatch bulged in upon The Thinking Machine in his laboratory.

"There was another," he announced.

"I know it," said The Thinking Machine, still bent over his worktable. "Who was it?"

"Maxwell Pittman," and Hatch related the story.

"There may be two more," the scientist remarked. "Be good enough to call a cab."

"Two more?" Hatch gasped in horror. "Already dead?"

"There may be, I said. One, Cecelia Montgomery, the other the unknown who called on the telephone last night." He started away, then returned to his worktable. "Here's rather an interesting experiment," he said. "See this tube," and he held aloft a heavy glass vessel, closed at one end, and with a stopcock at the other. "Observe. I'll place this heavy piece of rubber over the mouth of the tube, and then turn the stopcock." He suited the action to the word. "Now take it off."

The reporter tugged at it until the blood rushed to his face, but was unable to move it. He glanced up at the scientist in perplexity.

"What holds it there?"

"Vacuum," was the reply. "You may tear it to pieces, but no human power can pull it away whole." He picked up a steel bodkin, and thrust it through the rubber into the mouth of the tube. As he withdrew it, came a sharp, prolonged, hissing sound. Half a minute later the rubber fell off. "The vacuum is practically perfect—something like one-millionth of an atmosphere. The pin hole permits the air to fill the tube, the tremendous pressure against the rubber is removed, and—" He waved his slender hands.

In that instant a germ of comprehension was born in Hatch's brain; he was remembering some college experiments.

"If I should place that tube to your lips," The Thinking Machine resumed, "and turn the stopcock, you would

never speak again, never scream, never struggle. It would jerk every particle of air out of your body, paralyze you; within two minutes you would be dead. To remove the tube I should thrust the bodkin through your cheek, say your left, and withdraw it—"

Hatch gasped as the full horror of the thing burst upon him. "Absence of air in the lungs," the examining physicians had said.

"You see, there was no mystery in the manner of the deaths of these three," The Thinking Machine pointed out. "You knew what I have shown you, the physicians knew it, but neither of you knew you knew it. Genius is the ability to apply the knowledge you may have, not the ability to acquire it." His manner changed abruptly. "Please call a cab," he said again.

Together they were driven straight to the university, and shown into Professor Meredith's study. Professor Meredith showed his astonishment plainly at the visit, and astonishment became indignation amazement at the first question.

"Mr. Meredith, can you account for every moment of your time from mid-afternoon yesterday until four o'clock this morning?" The Thinking Machine queried flatly. "Don't misunderstand me—I mean every moment covering the time in which it is possible that Maxwell Pittman was murdered?"

"Why, it's a most outrageous—" Professor Meredith exploded.

"I'm trying to save you from arrest," the scientist explained curtly. "If you can account for all that time, and prove your statement, believe me, you had better prepare to do so. Now, if you could give me any information as to—"

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Professor Meredith belligerently. "What do you mean by daring to suggest—"

"My name is Van Dusen," said The Thinking Machine, "Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen. Long before your time I held the chair of philosophy in this university. I vacated it by request. Late the university honored me with a degree of LL. D."

The result of the self-introduction

was astonishing. Professor Meredith, in the presence of the master mind in the sciences, was a different man.

"I beg your pardon," he began.

"I'm curious to know if you are at all acquainted with Miss Danbury's family history," the scientist went on. "Meanwhile, Mr. Hatch, take the cab, and go straight and measure the precise width of the bruise on Pittman's lips; also, see Mr. Willing, if he is able to receive you, and ask him what he can give you as to Miss Danbury's history—I mean her family, her property, her connections, all about everything. Meet me at my house in a couple of hours."

Hatch went out, leaving them together. When he reached the scientist's home The Thinking Machine was just coming out.

"I'm on my way to see Mr. George Parsons, the so-called copper king," he volunteered. "Come along."

From that moment came several developments so curious, and bizarre, and so widely disassociated that Hatch could make nothing of them at all. Nothing seemed to fit into anything else. For instance, The Thinking Machine's visit to Mr. Parsons' office.

"Please ask Mr. Parsons if he will see Mr. Van Dusen?" he requested of an attendant.

"What about?" the query came from Mr. Parsons.

"It is a matter of life and death," the answer went back.

"Whose?" Mr. Parsons wanted to know.

"His!" The scientist's answer was equally short.

Immediately afterward The Thinking Machine disappeared inside. Ten minutes later he came out, and he and Hatch went off together, stopping at a toy shop to buy a small, high-grade, hard-rubber ball; and later at a department store to purchase a vicious-looking hatpin.

"You failed to inform me, Mr. Hatch, of the measurement of the bruise?"

"Precisely one and a quarter inches."

"Thanks! And what did Mr. Willing say?"

"I didn't see him as yet. I have an

appointment to see him in an hour from now."

"Very well," and The Thinking Machine nodded his satisfaction. "When you see him, will you be good enough to tell him, please, that I know—I know, do you understand?—who killed Miss Danbury, and Sumner, and Pittman. You can't make it too strong. I know—do you understand?"

"Do you know?" Hatch demanded quickly.

"No," frankly. "But convince him that I do, and add that to-morrow at noon I shall place the extraordinary facts I have gathered in possession of the police. At noon, understand; and I know!" He was thoughtful a moment. "You might add that I have informed you that the guilty person is a person of high position, whose name has been in no way connected with the crimes—that is, unpleasantly. You don't know that name; no one knows it except myself. I shall give it to the police at noon tomorrow."

"Anything else?"

"Drop in on me early to-morrow morning, and bring Mr. Mallory."

Events were cyclonic on that last morning. Mallory and Hatch had hardly arrived when there came a telephone message for the detective from police headquarters. Mrs. Cecelia Montgomery was there. She had come in voluntarily, and asked for Mr. Mallory.

"Don't rush off, now," requested The Thinking Machine, who was pottering around among the retorts, and microscopes and what not on his worktable. "Ask them to detain her until you get there. Also, ask her just what relationship existed between Miss Danbury and Henry Sumner." The detective went out; the scientist turned to Hatch. "Here is a hatpin," he said. "Some time this morning we shall have another caller. If, during the presence of that person in this room, I voluntarily put anything to my lips, a bottle, say, or anything is forced upon me, and I do not remove it in just thirty seconds, you will thrust this hatpin through my cheek. Don't hesitate."

"Thrust it through?" the reporter repeated. An uncanny chill ran over him as he realized the scientist's meaning. "Is it absolutely necessary to take such a chance to—"

"I say if I don't remove it!" The Thinking Machine interrupted shortly. "You and Mallory will be watching from another room; I shall demonstrate the exact manner of the murders." There was a troubled look in the reporter's face. "I shall be in no danger," the scientist said simply. "The hatpin is merely a precaution if anything should go wrong."

After a little Mallory entered, with clouded countenance.

"She denies the murders," he announced, "but admits that the hand prints in blood are hers. According to her yarn, she searched Miss Danbury's room and Sumner's room after the murders to find some family papers which were necessary to establish claims to some estate—I don't quite understand. She hurt her hand in Miss Danbury's room, and it bled a lot, hence the hand print. From there she went straight to Sumner's room, and presumably left the smudge there. It seems that Sumner was a distant cousin of Miss Danbury's—the only son of a younger brother who ran away years ago after some wild escapade, and came to this country. George Parsons, the copper king, is the only other relative in this country. She advises us to warn him to be on his guard—seems to think he will be the next victim."

"He's already warned," said The Thinking Machine, "and he has gone West on important business."

Mallory stared.

"You seem to know more about this case than I do," he sneered.

"I do," asserted the scientist, "quite a lot more."

"I think the third degree will change Mrs. Montgomery's story some," the detective declared. "Perhaps she will remember better—"

"She is telling the truth."

"Then why did she run away? How was it we found her handkerchief in

Mr. Willing's office after the Pittman affair? How was it—"

The Thinking Machine shrugged his shoulders, and was silent. A moment later the door opened, and Martha appeared, her eyes blazing with indignation.

"That man who swore at me over the telephone," she announced distinctly, "wants to see you, sir."

Mallory's keen eyes swept the faces of the scientist and the reporter, trying to fathom the strange change that came over them.

"You are sure, Martha?" asked The Thinking Machine.

"Indeed I am, sir." She was positive about it. "I'd never forget his voice, sir."

For an instant her master merely stared at her, then dismissed her with a curt, "Show him in," after which he turned to the detective and Hatch.

"You will wait in the next room," he said tersely. "If anything happens, Mr. Hatch, remember."

The Thinking Machine was sitting when the visitor entered—a middle-aged man, sharp-featured, rather spare, brisk in his movements, and distinctly well groomed. It was Mr. Herbert Willing, attorney. In one hand he carried a small bag. He paused an instant, and gazed at the diminutive scientist curiously.

"Come in, Mr. Willing," The Thinking Machine greeted. "You want to see me about—" He paused questioningly.

"I understand," said the lawyer suavely, "that you have interested yourself in these recent—er—remarkable murders, and there are some points I should like to discuss with you. I have same papers in my bag here, which"—he opened it—"may be of interest. Some er—newspaper man informed me that you have certain information indicating the person—"

"I know the name of the murderer," said The Thinking Machine.

"Indeed! May I ask who it is?"

"You may. His name is Herbert Willing."

Watching tensely Hatch saw The

Thinking Machine pass his hand slowly across his mouth as if to stifle a yawn; saw Willing leap forward suddenly with what seemed to be a bottle in his hand; saw him force the scientist back into his chair, and thrust the bottle against his lips. Instantly came a sharp click, and some hideous change came over the scientist's wizened face. His eyes opened wide in terror, his cheeks seemed to collapse. Instinctively he grasped the bottle with both hands.

For a scant second Willing stared at him, his countenance grown demoniacal; then he swiftly took something else from the small bag, and smashed it on the floor. It was a drinking glass!

After which the scientist calmly removed the bottle from his lips.

"The broken drinking glass," he said quietly, "completes the evidence."

Hutchinson Hatch was lean and wiry, and hard as nails; Detective Mallory's bulk concealed muscles of steel, but it took both of them to overpower the attorney. Heedless of the struggling trio The Thinking Machine was curiously scrutinizing the black bottle. The mouth was blocked by a small rubber ball, which he had thrust against it with his tongue a fraction of an instant before the dreaded power the bottle held had been released by pressure upon a cunningly concealed spring. When he raised his squinting eyes at last, Willing, manacled, was glaring at him in impotent rage. Fifteen minutes later the four were at police headquarters; Mrs. Montgomery was awaiting them.

"Mrs. Montgomery, why"—and the petulant pale-blue eyes of The Thinking Machine were fixed upon her face—"why didn't you go to Concord, as you had said?"

"I did go there," she replied. "It was simply that when news came of Miss Danbury's terrible death I was frightened, I lost my head; I pleaded with my friends not to let it be known that I was there, and they agreed. If any one had searched their house I would have been found; no one did. At last I could stand it no longer. I came to the city, and straight here to explain everything I knew in connection with the affair."

"And the search you made of Miss Danbury's room? And of Sumner's room?"

"I've explained that," she said. "I knew of the relationship between poor Harry Sumner and Violet Danbury, and I knew each of them had certain papers which were of value as establishing their claims to a great estate in England now in litigation. I was sure those papers would be valuable to the only other claimant, who was—"

"Mr. George Parsons, the copper king," interposed the scientist. "You didn't find the papers you sought because Willing had taken them. That estate was the thing he wanted, and I dare say by some legal jugglery he would have gotten it." Again he turned to face Mrs. Montgomery. "Living with Miss Danbury, as you did, you probably held a key to her apartments? Yes. You had only the difficulty then, of entering the hotel late at night, unseen, and that seemed to be simple. Willing did it the night he killed Miss Danbury, and left it unseen, as you did. Now, how did you enter Sumner's room?"

"It was a terrible place," and she shuddered slightly. "I went in alone, and entered his room through a window from a fire escape. The newspapers, you will remember, described its location precisely, and—"

"I see," The Thinking Machine interrupted. He was silent a moment. "You're a shrewd man, Willing, and your knowledge of natural philosophy is exact if not extensive. Of course, I knew if you thought I knew too much about the murders you would come to me. You did. It was a trap, if that's any consolation to you. You fell into it. And, curiously enough, I wasn't afraid of a knife or a shot; I knew the instrument of death you had been using was too satisfactory and silent for you to change. However, I was prepared for it, and—I think that's all." He arose.

"All?" Hatch and Mallory echoed the word. "We don't understand—"

"Oh!" and The Thinking Machine sat down again. "It's logic. Miss Danbury was dead—neither shot, stabbed, poi-

oned, nor choked; 'absence of air in her lungs,' the physicians said. Instantly the vacuum bottle suggested itself. That murder, as was the murder of Sumner, was planned to counterfeit suicide, hence the broken goblet on the floor. Incidentally the murder of Sumner informed me that the crimes were the work of a madman, else there was an underlying purpose which might have arisen through a relationship. Ultimately I established that relationship through Professor Meredith, in whom Miss Danbury had confided to a certain extent; at the same time he convinced me of his innocence in the affair.

"Now," he continued, after a moment,

On August 23rd you will get the September Month-end POPULAR containing the fourth of the "Thinking Machine" stories. It is called "The Jackdaw." Don't miss it—it's "the best yet."



THE UMPIRE

By Walt Mason

BE kind to the umpire who bosses the game, whose doom is too frequently sealed; it serves no good purpose to camp on his frame, and strew him all over the field.

The umpire is human—which fact you may doubt—a creature of tissues and blood; he pales at the sound of your bloodthirsty shout, and shrinks from the sickening thud. He may have a vine-covered cottage like yours, a home where a loving wife dwells; and when he's on duty the fear she endures is something no chronicler tells. She hears from the bleachers a thunderous roar, and thinks it announces his fate. "I reckon," she sighs, "he'll come home on a door, or perhaps in a basket or crate."

Be kind to the umpire; his hopes are your own; he's doing the best that he can; his head isn't elm and his heart isn't stone, he's just like the neighboring man. Don't call him a bonehead or say his work's punk, or that he's a robber insist; don't pelt him with castings or vitrified junk, or smite him with bludgeon or fist.

Suppose you are doing the best you know how, and striving your blamedest to please, and bystanders throw at your head a dead cow, or break your legs off at the knees. Suppose you are trying your best to be fair, and critics come up in a crowd, set fire to your whiskers, and pull out your hair, and put you in shape for a shroud. If people refused to believe that you try to give them their fifty cents' worth, you'd be so discouraged you'd sit down and cry, and say there's no justice on earth.

Be kind to the umpire and give him a chance to live to a happy old age; reward him with praise and encouraging glance when he does his devoir on his stage. Save up your dead cats for the scavenger man, your cabbage for cigarette smoke; the umpire is doing the best that he can—he shouldn't be killed as a joke.

"we come to the murder of Pittman. Pittman learned, and tried to phone me, who the murderer was. Willing heard that message. He killed Pittman, then bound and gagged himself, and waited. It was a clever ruse. His story of being overpowered and drugged is absurd on the face of it, yet he asked us to believe that by leaving a handkerchief of Mrs. Montgomery's on the floor. That was reeking with drugs. Mr. Hatch can give you more of these details." He glanced at his watch. "I'm due at a luncheon, where I am to make an address to the Society of Psychical Research. If you'll excuse me——"

He went out; the others sat staring after him

Sledge's Way

By George Randolph Chester

Author of "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," "He's a Corker," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

\$250,000 surplus has accumulated, and Frank Marley, president of the street railway company, suggests that it be used to build proposed extensions. But Marley is "in bad" with Sledge, the Big Boss, and when the matter is put up to Tom Bendix, Sledge's go-between and legal adviser, he wants to cut the melon among the few favorites of the Big Boy. Before anything is decided the news of this easy money leaks out, and three suave individuals, Messrs. Timbers, Bozzam, and Moodson, arrive in town with a perfectly good scheme for unloading a fake street railroad proposition on the unsuspecting populace and extracting the \$250,000. As they outline the scheme to Bendix they show him that Sledge's crowd will divide the spoils and that Frank Marley will go to the wall. Sledge has just seen and fallen in love with Molly Marley, and when Bendix reports the scheme to the Boss he finds that, thanks to the Big Boy's interest in Molly, her father has been reinstated in Sledge's estimation. Bendix is directed to break with the newcomers and devise some plan for the disposition of the surplus that will include Marley. Through Bert Glider, a young society man and friend of Molly, Sledge finds out that the girl likes red roses. He gets her to invite him to a little party that she is giving, and when she reaches home that afternoon she finds florists' vans unloading bales of red roses at her house. Sledge appears at the party with a thirty-dollar box of candy, and more red roses. He hands Molly season tickets for the opera and the athletic club fights as favors for her young guests. Sledge also supplies impromptu music by a celebrated band, and finally brings the party to a stunning close with a spectacular display of fireworks that ties up traffic and arouses that part of the city. And then, when her guests have gone, the "instantaneous" Sledge proposes. Molly promptly refuses him, but he calmly assures her that she'll "come around to it." To prove her independence Molly promptly agrees to marry Bert. Sledge sees the announcement in the paper and telephones to Molly about it. Bert, who is there and realizes that the Boss will surely break him if it is true, denies the story in Molly's presence. She promptly returns his ring in disgust. But when a later edition contains the news that the Boss is to be "Cupid's candidate," she immediately reinstates Glider. Between them they plan to keep Sledge in ignorance of the affair until Bert can put through a real-estate deal that requires Sledge's backing. But Bert gets drunk and lets the secret out. Sledge calls Molly up to tell her that in five minutes Bert will be "smashed." "And you'll go to the penitentiary!" says Molly in reply.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SOCIETY OF POLITICS AND SOME EMINENT SOCIOLOGY.

THE governor's ball being considered by common consent the first social gun of the season, after which lesser social lights might presume to shine with authorization, everybody who was anybody made it a point to be there and compare artillery. They made it a special point this year, since Governor Waver's term was expiring, and a share, at least, of the governor's social glory would flicker out with his office.

Molly Marley, in the first breathing moment after the grand circle of introductions, led Fern about the stately,

modern mansion with an air of proprietorship, for this was her second visit, and she displayed with glee the conservatory fountains, the marble swimming pool, the pipe organ, the outdoor sleeping rooms, and the sunken gardens, all of which she had mentioned to Sledge the previous day. She had not known until afterward that she had had this very place in mind.

"It's a dream," declared Fern, with awed enthusiasm. "Wouldn't you like to own a wonderful place like this, Molly?"

"It isn't worth the moral price," judged Molly, looking about the beautiful grounds with a sigh of admiration, nevertheless. "It would be nice, though, after all," she finally admitted.

"Mrs. Waver doesn't seem to enjoy it," wondered Fern. "She hides as much as possible, I think."

"She's never gotten over her fear of using the wrong fork," guessed Molly. "That wasn't nice, Fern," she quickly added. "Mrs. Waver is a good, sweet woman, like my own mother was, but I don't believe she is quite comfortable in all this magnificence. Governor Waver, on the other hand, likes it, and consequently looks as if he belonged here."

"That's the trouble with most marriages," observed Fern, from the depth of her twenty-one years of wisdom. "They're so unequal. It's perfectly ghastly, Molly, for either a man or a woman to marry beneath their own capabilities of expansion."

"What does it say on the next page?" laughed Molly.

They were winding up out of the quaintly lighted sunken gardens, and they both stopped to admire the coldly severe beauty of the big white marble house as it lay gleaming in the moonlight.

"That there's no danger of that with you and Bert, you lucky girl," replied Fern, with a queer note in her voice, at which Molly wondered. "Bert's a dandy fellow. It makes me hopping mad, on your account, when anybody knocks him."

"Has The-Lord-help-the-absent-member Club got at him, too?" asked Molly, with a smile. "I thought only women were eligible for discussion."

"They take anybody," dryly commented Fern. "But, after all, it is you who are up."

"Me!" gasped Molly. "Tell me the worst about myself."

"You've made a sensational hit," giggled Fern, "and that's enough to send you to the electric chair any place. However, they're taking it out in pity."

"They must hate me, then!" Molly felt assured at last of her success. "But why pity?"

"Bert," responded Fern. "He isn't here, you know."

"He telephoned me, this afternoon,

he might be late," said Molly, with a slightly worried air. "What of it?"

"Common malice, on view in the cloakroom, has it that he is at the present moment unpresentable," stated Fern, and waited. "It would be absurd if it were not so mean. I gave one cat a piece of my mind about it—the feather-chinned woman, with the purple condolence ribbons fastened on her cerise chiffon with brass furniture tacks."

Molly howled at the description.

"Wow!" she gasped. "That's Mrs. Senator Allerton. What did you say to her?"

"That she seemed so happy to believe the worst, and that—"

"I'll give you my little spangle fan for that, as soon as we go home," promised Molly.

"You're almost as liberal as Sledge," complimented Fern. "I wouldn't give up that spangle fan for worlds. What do you suppose is keeping Bert, Molly?"

"He's probably slewed, to use the Sledge dictionary," responded Molly calmly.

"Does that mean the same as jagged?"

"Spifflocated," elucidated Molly. "Don't look so shocked, Fern. Bert isn't in the habit of it. Any of the boys will tell you that he's so sober he breaks up most of their parties."

"Then why did he show off to-night?"

"I believe they call it drowning their sorrows," explained Molly quietly. "He lost everything to-day—money, business, prospects. Sledge broke him."

"Poor Bert!" sympathized the warm-hearted Fern. "Why, that putty-faced old thief! Molly! He did it on your account! Isn't he clever! How on earth did he work it?"

"Had Bert tie up all his money, including some he borrowed, in property Sledge depreciated in value, then Sledge had the bank call the loan. Bert can't pay, and the bank seizes the property. Moreover, nobody will invest in Bert's enterprises since they know that Sledge is against him."

"I don't blame him for getting—What does Sledge call it?"

"Slewed."

"Do you?"

"He'll probably feel sorry for it tomorrow," evaded Molly. "A man's conscience usually hurts him when he can't eat."

They had neared the house, and now a slender figure in black came rapidly toward them.

"Is that you, Molly?" inquired the anxious voice of Frank Marley.

"It is your fair daughter," she lightly assured him.

"They are missing you," he declared, with all the responsibility of a successful showman. "The governor and his wife, Senator Allerton, the mayor, and a dozen others have been inquiring about you. You are this year's prize beauty," and he laughed proudly.

Embarrassed by the display he apparently wished to make of her, Molly followed him into the maze of gorgeous drawing-rooms, where the aristocracy of Ring County and the State displayed its evening clothes in constantly shifting array.

The mayor himself, a keen-eyed young man, with a preternaturally bald head, and a reputation which followed him about like a black cat, came hurrying up to her with her dance program in his hand. With him was a gangling old beau, with a professional lady-killer smirk, whom he introduced by an unintelligible name, and handed to Fern as a penance for all her misdeeds.

"They're already forming for the grand march," the mayor informed her, as he led the way to the big ballroom with the magnificent pipe organ, which Molly had coveted for a year.

The line was formed halfway down the hall, and the parade was filling rapidly and with much laughing confusion as the mayor hurried with her down toward the center of the hall, where the governor already stood with his lady.

"Where is our place?" asked Molly, figuring rapidly. There was a State senator, a world-famous sociologist, a musician of international reputation, and three State representatives. The mayor probably would be about number eight.

"Oh, I'm not your partner," he regretted. "I'm not so lucky. I don't

even get to dance with you until number eight," and, to Molly's breathless delight, he led her straight up to the eminent sociologist, who stood immediately behind the governor.

The eminent sociologist, who, under that title, had sounded so forbidding, proved to be a young-looking man, with a dancing eye, who hailed her with joy, and unspokenly claimed attention solely on his merits as a live member.

She found it difficult, as he smiled so frankly and boyishly at her, to remember that this was a man whose name was known throughout the civilized world for his keen thought upon political economy in its broadest sense, and the astounding part of it was that he was so good-looking, graceful, and self-possessed, and, most astounding of all, that he immediately began to talk to her about baseball.

The equally eminent musician, just behind him, claimed Professor Watt's attention for a moment, and Molly glanced complacently back along the line. Mrs. Allerton, the wife of the senator, was just behind her, looking hot daggers into her shoulder blades, and Molly, suppressing a giggle as she noted the purple condolence ribbons nailed on with furniture tacks, gazed calmly through her at the other social Lucrezia Borgias, whom she had passed at one ruthless bound.

Also, she cast her eyes downward, with much satisfaction, at her own extravagantly simple frock of pearl-woven white chiffon. Only youth and a good figure could dare a frock like that, and, happy in her new enemies, Molly glanced at the dance program which had been made out for her.

She caught her breath with incredulous joy as she saw her allotment. Every notable in the gathering was on her card, beginning with the governor. Number nine was Sledge, and she wondered, with dawning horror, what sort of figure he would be in the dance.

She had little time for reflection, for the music started up just then, and, at the same moment, the eminent sociologist began to talk to her about a new roller coaster installed last season at

Coney Island, and his pain in never having had a ride on it.

Professor Watt danced without knowing it, and talked without effort, and laughed without deliberation; and when he led her into the drawing-room, she was offering a silent vote of thanks to the maker of her program. Mayor Cameron, however, gave her no chance to enjoy the scientist. He rushed up with a visiting millionaire, introduced him, and dragged away Professor Watt, all with the celerity of a switch engine.

The visiting millionaire was a gray-haired sport, with a white mustache, but a ruddy face, who knew more about lead ore than any man in the world, knew more about money than he did about lead ore, and knew more about making himself agreeable to young girls than he did about making money. A couple of native millionaires tried to attach themselves to the party, but the outsider drove them jealously away, and dashed straight along with the line of entertainment which had made him a welcome visitor wherever rice powder was known.

Molly was truly sorry to see him go, but the governor, a finely groomed, elderly chap, whose fundamental brogue was Irish, whose manners were Southern, and whose mustache and goatee were French, led her away for the next dance, and breathed harmless, old-fashioned flatteries into her ear until it tickled. It was all very interesting, and a triumph for her, too; but, nevertheless, she was pleased when her sudden friend, the mayor, took her away from the governor, and for her between-dance diversion made her a present of an intent-featured young man who ran an inherited railroad to make money, and ran it quite well enough, but who raced yachts for a living.

Thus sped the evening, with Molly climbing the dizzy heights of popularity, in hourly increasing excitement. She not only had a notable partner for every dance, but a brilliant partner for every tête-à-tête between numbers, and the almost equally happy, though not so highly favored, Fern, warned her, in a giggling, whispered moment, to keep

her back to the wall, lest she be stabbed. Her cup of happiness was full when the famous musician, a nearsighted man, who wore his hair short, and inspected her rapturously through half-inch-thick glasses, composed a sparkling little rondo for her at a piano in a quiet little alcove, and named it *Molly*, and wrote it on her dance card, all in the space of seven minutes. True, he had danced with her two numbers before, and had had time to think of her; possibly to think of her in rondo terms.

Occasionally, she caught sight of Sledge in the throng, although she had not seen him on the floor, and she realized that her number with him would be a "sit out." Perhaps that was why it had been put down so far in the program, when she would welcome a rest. It was like his doing, for she had to acknowledge that he was at least far-sighted.

One thing perplexed her. He was much less awkward, and much more at ease here, than he had been at her party. Whenever she saw him he was talking gravely with men of large affairs, and, to her surprise, she observed that, in every case, he was accorded notable respect. Even the musician seemed absorbently interested in him, and her leadore millionaire came back to him again and again. She wondered why men sought him, and she was still wondering when the eminent sociologist fairly snatched her out of the arms of the mayor, after the eighth dance.

"Come and watch me smoke a cigarette," he begged her. "I've been trying to get a chance to talk with you again the entire evening, but there's always such an increasingly mad scramble around you that the attempts made me feel undignified."

"You'd worry a lot about that," she guessed.

"Wouldn't I?" he laughed. "Will you chill if we step out on the terrace?"

"I don't know how," she happily told him, and they hurried outside, where he led her to a seat in the moonlight, and deftly made her comfortable with three cushions, from as many chairs.

Sledge and Senator Allerton passed

them as he lit his cigarette, and he looked after Sledge until the match burned his fingers.

"There is the biggest man I have seen in a long while," he remarked, as he sat beside her on the settee.

"They say he is not only the boss of the city, but of the State," replied Molly, very much interested. "You knew that, didn't you?"

"Of course," he acknowledged, "but I scarcely think that would influence my judgment. I have studied a great many men of more power and influence than he has at present, but none of them, so far as I can recollect, seemed to have his elemental force. Wherever he was born, he would have been a leader. He is a wonderful man. Throw him in a savage country, and he would be king."

"I don't understand it," puzzled Molly. "He is undoubtedly a leader here, but they say that he is a bad leader."

"A grafter?" queried Professor Watt, with a smile. "That is the accident of his environment, and of your unsettled social conditions. Pardon me, but, in cities such as yours, there is but little else for a leader to do. The men who occupy the political offices of high honor are, for the most part, puppets. Your society is neither large enough nor small enough, and is composed of intensely complex elements. People of the most sordid birth and attainments rub elbows with people of breeding and culture, and there seems to be no dividing line. In such a conglomerate condition, the man of elemental force, being bound to rise to the top, must use his materials as he finds them, and to his own ends, just as the musician, the artist, the sculptor, the writer does; just as I do, and, within your more limited sphere, pardon me for saying it, just as you do."

"I?" she asked, opening and closing her fan, and glancing out to where chatting couples were sauntering. After all, Professor Watt was an eminent sociologist.

"Certainly," the professor resumed. "You take into your consideration, with such thoughtfulness concerning them as

you have cultivated, all the elements, human and otherwise, which might have a bearing upon your future, and from them you shape your life toward what you believe will be your biggest happiness. Your failure or success in your very marriage will depend upon the intuitive wisdom which you bring to bear upon your overpowering problem of self. Just so your man Sledge works, and if his entire environment and world is centered upon the problem of material wealth, you may rest assured that, out of the struggle, he will emerge a victor. If political control is the path he has chosen——"

A huge figure approached them.

"Hello, Watt," rumbled the deep voice of Sledge. "My dance, Molly."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TIME OF HER LIFE—BY ARRANGEMENT.

"Well, you having a good time?" asked Sledge, sitting comfortably in the seat Mr. Watt had just vacated.

"The time of my life," she assured him, with happy animation.

"That's the word," he heartily approved. "If there's anybody here you want just tell Cameron. If he don't trot 'em right over, tell me."

"The mayor has been very kind," acknowledged Molly, beginning to wonder.

"He's got his orders," returned Sledge complacently. "Let me see your dance program," and he took it from her lap. "I thought so," he commented. "There's a dark horse turned up, and you didn't get him."

"A dark horse?" she faltered.

"A ringer," he explained. "Lord Bunncrase. Andrew Lepton, the big coffee monopolist, sneaked him in here under an alias, and nobody's on." He puzzled over the card a moment. "Excuse me till I fix it," and he stalked away.

Molly sat silently, allowing a cold wave of humiliation to slowly chill her soul. Why, Sledge had carefully pre-arranged her triumph of the evening.

He had assumed control of her dance card and of her succession of delightful tête-à-têtes. He had driven the star performers into her net, as if they had been droves of sheep. True, men had sought her a second time of their own accord, because of that charm which she knew she possessed; a vaguely understood attractiveness, which was more than beauty, more than cleverness, more than mere sex receptiveness. She had won by her own power, but Sledge had given her the glorious opportunities. His omnipotence began to annoy her, and his ruthlessness to inflame her already inflamed resentment.

She knew precisely what was happening at this moment. He was creating havoc in not less than half a dozen dance cards, with no compunction about having discommoded or distressed any one. Then there was Bert, downtown, battling with a disaster which had thrown him completely from his feet. Poor Bert! She had by no means forgotten him, even amid the height of her excitement. She should have been there to comfort him; and yet, well, he had not seen fit to come to her for comfort. Men were queer creatures. A woman, when disaster overtook her, did not need to deaden her intelligence. She needed it then more than ever.

After all, though, Bert was a man, and that was the way of men, and there was no use to dream of overturning the entire accepted order of creation. She was certain, however, that she could be of more help to Bert after they were married. He was weaker than she had thought.

Very well, Sledge had thrown down the gage of battle. He had laughed when he was threatened, and had ruined Bert, in challenging defiance. Let him now take the consequences. If he went to the penitentiary, well and good. He had probably sent other people there, with no more qualms of mercy than she would now show to him. She could be as ruthless as he. What was it Professor Watt had called the quality? Elemental force, that was it. Well, she possessed it, too. She felt it within her, stirring with the same physical nascence

as the virility of parenthood, to which it was so closely allied.

Sledge came back with her card.

"Next dance," he said, showing her the name of Lord Bunnchase opposite the tenth number. "Took it away from Mrs. Allerton."

In spite of her anger, Molly snickered.

"Does Mrs. Allerton know that her number-ten dance was to have been with a title?" she asked, with a sudden intense desire to giggle it over with Fern.

"Not yet. He's only Edgar Chase on her card. She thought she was winning when Cameron gave her the lead-ore millionaire instead."

"It's like politics," Molly commented, feeling a vague, distant thrill for the intricacies of the game.

"Everything's politics," he rumbled. "You like this house, don't you?"

"I think it's the most wonderful place in the world," she declared.

"I doped that out to-night," he stated. "It's got all the fancy lugs you spoke about yesterday. Waver don't want to sell it. I just asked him."

She laughed again, even in the midst of her rising anger.

"You won't need a house," she informed him, really gloating over his coming downfall. "You've run the world long enough. We're going to stop you—Bert and I."

He favored her with a sample of the laugh which his political enemies never heard without a shiver, and he turned upon her eyes which were freezing in their insolent contempt, not of her particularly, but of everything.

"Quit bluffing," he protested. "I don't."

"Nor am I!" she hotly retorted. "You have broken Bert, as you promised. Now he will break you!"

"I'm waiting," he chuckled. "Where's pretty Bert? Soused!"

She jumped from her seat. She searched wildly for some retort, but could not find it.

"Don't get sore, Molly," he kindly advised her. "I don't want to lead you up to any more trouble, but I will if I have to. You can't marry Bert. You're

too smart a woman. Ten years from now he'll rattle around at your side like a dried pea."

"That's one thing you can't dictate!" she furiously told him, standing tall and straight, with clenched fists, in the moonlight. He again commended his choice as he looked at her. "I'll be Bert's wife in less than a month."

She left him in ponderous contemplation of her on the settee, and hurried into the house, with a half-formed plan of going home, and sending Dicky Reynolds or some one in search of Bert, but the mayor met her, and had introduced her to Lord Bunnchase, and sent her in the direction of the ballroom on that titled gentleman's arm, before she quite knew what was happening to her.

Lord Bunnchase was a yellow-mustached man, with a particularly surly face, who sprawled stiffly through a two-step with her, and made three remarks, consisting of three separate apologies for bumping her into other dancers, but, in spite of the fact that he was the least-distinguished-looking of any of the gentlemen on the floor, Molly noticed, with a distinctly uncomfortable feeling, that not only were the eyes of all the dancers focused on them, but that the nondancers suddenly thronged the doorways and the balconies, and never stopped staring.

With a sinking heart, she realized once more the impertinent organization methods of Sledge, who had stage-managed this whole affair so that the identity of Lord Bunnchase should not be known until she was on the floor with him, thus giving her the acute center of the stage. Sledge was bound to give her the time of her life, confound him!

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER PROOF OF THE CHIEF'S EARNEST AFFECTION.

Just off the governor's stuffed leather library was a small room, with a hard desk and six hard chairs, and a hard-looking letter file, and a hard, fire-proof safe let into the wall, and here, while Lord Bunnchase led Molly Marley

through the paces of a hard two-step, Governor Waver, and Senator Allerton, and Sledge, and Frank Marley gathered for a few moments of comfortable chat, such as elderly gentlemen love to indulge while frivolous younger people danced the flying hours away. All four being gentlemen who, by the consent of the public, bore the grave responsibility of the public welfare on their shoulders, it was not strange that their chat should turn to public affairs.

"I am glad to be identified with the enterprise," avowed State Senator Allerton, who was a suave, clean-faced gentlemen, with a good forehead and a quite negotiable tongue. "At the same time, so far as I am privately concerned, I can only regard it as a temporary investment."

"Why temporary?" demanded Frank Marley, who was feeling particularly capable this evening. His hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of street-railway stock had been increased to two hundred and sixty-two thousand five hundred. He was to have eighty-seven thousand five hundred dollars cash out of the undivided surplus of the old company, and his daughter, Molly, was the most popular girl at the governor's ball. "The street-railway company has always made money, and the city needs additional transportation facilities. We have reached the normal period of extension, and I do not see what is to prevent us from limitless prosperity."

"The franchises," Senator Allerton reminded him. "Your present permits have less than five years to run."

"I have never had any trouble in having them renewed," objected Marley, priding himself on his management.

"Times are changing," sighed Allerton. "There is a growing disposition on the part of the public to charge public-service corporations for the use of public property."

"The people are ungrateful," mourned Governor Waver, who had enriched himself through furnishing electric light, at his own price, to a public which had known nothing better than gas. "The moment they see a profit on their

luxuries they want part of it. An undivided surplus, such as the street-car company has had, is a constant menace."

"That was a sinking fund for extensions and improvements," Marley reminded him. "The stockholders had no right to ask for a division of it."

"They would, if we had not put it out of harm's road," insisted the governor. "That much has been saved to the men who really earned it, but I should not like to see a similar profit exposed. To my mind, a seven-per-cent dividend is an even worse folly."

"It gives confidence in the stock," argued Marley. "The public would never be so eager to take up this new issue, if it had not been for that seven-per-cent dividend."

"That's what it was for," interpolated Sledge, looking out of the window into the sunken garden, and vainly hunting the handhole in the gate.

"It has served its purpose," granted Allerton, "but taxpayers are becoming greedy. When they see the stockholders of a public corporation making seven per cent, they want some of it, and try to make the corporations pay part of their taxes. In every city of importance, the voters are demanding pay for street-car franchises, and making the street-railway companies, in addition, bear half the cost of all street improvements."

"It's a bad outlook," agreed Governor Waver. "Frankly, as soon as I receive my new issue of stock, I shall have it quietly placed on sale."

Marley looked at him indignantly.

"Why, the street-railway company is entering on the greatest period of prosperity in its career," he asserted. "There'll be no trouble about franchises. The city is wild to have the improvements, and must have them."

Allerton looked at him wonderingly.

"Waver is right," he stated. "I shall sell my own stock, and I'll venture to say that Sledge has already made silent arrangements for disposing of his. Do you know that the franchises at present granted in this State are revocable, and that it is not possible to secure one

which is positively safe for longer than ten-year periods? When you come to the renewal of your franchises, Marley, you will be met with a demand for pay, and will have other restrictions imposed on you. Our present franchise law, in view of the public tendency, is a bad one for investors."

"Let's fix it," suggested Sledge.

"I'm afraid it's too late," protested Allerton.

"Not for a new gag," dissented Sledge. "A new one can be put over quick."

"I fancy that there should be protection somewhere," opined the governor. "No matter what changes in public sentiment, the investing class, upon which the public depends for prosperity, must always be protected."

"But how?" inquired the senator. "How, in this particular case?"

"Head 'em off," grunted Sledge. "I'm keeping my stock."

"I'd be glad to hold mine," stated the senator. "But how is it to be made of future value?"

"That's up to you," Sledge replied, rising. "Figure it out, and see me to-morrow. Marley, I want to talk to you."

Mr. Marley, to-day a man worth over a third of a million dollars in the street-railway stock alone, arose, in offended dignity. He was a trifle too important, too capable, and too wealthy to be ordered about like a messenger boy, by a man who might shortly be a convicted criminal. Molly had arranged an interview between her father and Bert on the previous afternoon, and Mr. Marley, also, now knew a thing or two.

"I would suggest to-morrow," he stated coldly. "I should much prefer to talk with you during business hours."

"This ain't business," said Sledge, leading the way into the library, where he took a seat in an alcove.

Marley followed him reluctantly.

"If it is my family affairs—" he began, in protest.

"Sit down," directed Sledge. "Bert Glider has been making threats against me."

"Has he?" inquired Marley noncomittally.

"Tell him to quit or make good," ordered Sledge.

"Really, Mr. Sledge, I don't see where I can interfere," reproved Mr. Marley. "The matter is entirely between you and Bert."

"He's a friend of yours," charged Sledge.

"Yes," acknowledged Marley, feeling that he could afford to acknowledge it now that the street-car reorganization had gone beyond the point where Sledge could stop it.

"How about this marriage with Molly?"

"That is Molly's affair," stated Marley stiffly.

"You know he's broke, don't you?"

"I heard something of the sort," admitted Marley. "He is a clever young man, however, and, until he gets on his feet again, I have money enough for both."

"You won't stop it, then?"

"Certainly not," declared Marley, feeling that he might just as well make capital for courage out of the fact that he could not, in the slightest degree, influence Molly. "I might, perhaps, prefer a more brilliant match for Molly, but I do not need to make it a matter of money, and there is no better family in America than Bert's. The Maryland Gliders are the oldest and best stock in this country. Moreover, above all things, I wish to see my daughter happy."

"So do I," asserted Sledge. "That's why she can't marry this pinhead. I want her myself."

"Molly has made her choice," declared her father firmly.

"So you lay down, eh?"

"I decline to interfere."

"Making Bert a bum cuts no ice?"

"His temporary financial condition has no bearing in the matter. I should feel humiliated to think that I had allowed that trifling consideration to be a factor."

"Hunh!" grunted Sledge. "You got enough for both, eh?"

"Quite enough," and Marley re-

flected, with a pleasant feeling of superiority, upon the moment, soon to come, when this political and commercial bully would be cringing.

"Then watch out for your eye," warned Sledge, and, rising, walked out into the drawing-rooms.

He found Molly quite busy, but, since she was only occupied with a State representative, and a local millionaire, and the mayor, and the young champion of the tennis players' club, he borrowed her.

She was astounded to see how they melted before him, and almost had a feeling of wildly clutching at the coat tails of the mayor, whom she heartily disliked.

"I'm sorry for you, Molly," Sledge told her as he preempted the piano alcove. "I got to hand you another jolt."

"You're a fast worker," she complimented him. "But you'll have to work faster. I just gave Willie Walters a hint of the splendid news we are to have for the *Blade*, and he is tickled to death."

"Good work!" applauded Sledge. "I want that pulled quick."

Molly smiled.

"All right; go as far as you like," she confidently invited him. "We'll see who gets the worst of it. By the way, maybe you wouldn't mind telling me the new jolt I am to receive."

Sledge chuckled.

"Your dad says he don't care if Bert is a bum."

"He isn't!" she hotly denied.

"Your dad's a game sport. He says he has enough money for both."

"Good for daddy!" she cried, delighted.

"Sure!" grunted Sledge. "I'm goana break him, too."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SLEDGE REDUCES HIS SALARY LIST.

Sledge walked back through the Occident in such a mood that the regular members of the "Good morning, Ben" brigade fell away from him like bar flies from a cake of ice. Even Doc Turner,

waiting the daily advent of the Boss, met with the rebuff of stony silence, and sat down in his favorite newspaper corner, with his crusted brown derby jammed down to his ears and his inch-long stub of cigar puckered tightly in at the corner of his wrinkled lips, where it looked, at a distance, like a speck of black rot in a dusty potato. Doc had digested, condensed, and surveyed news to the Big Chief so long that he felt a proprietorship in that department, and was justly offended when Tom Bendix came in a few minutes later.

"What's the matter with Sledge this morning?" snarled Doc.

"How do I know?" immediately snarled Bendix. "I don't sleep with him."

"He's got a grouch on him a foot thick," complained Doc. "He gave me a cold turndown. Walked straight through me, without even a grunt."

"I'll tell Sledge he'd better be careful," sarcastically commented Bendix. "Well, Kelly, what do you want?"

Schooner Kelly, who was afflicted with pink whiskers and a perennial thirst, stopped scratching.

"Two bits," he stated, with admirable clarity. "What's the matter with Big Ben?"

"He's teething," replied Bendix, producing the desired two bits, without which Schooner Kelly would be a nuisance for hours to come.

A low-browed thug, with a long and wide scar sunk in one cheek, drew Bendix mysteriously aside.

"The Dutchman down in the eighth ward has rented his back room to the Hazelnut Club," he stated.

"Well?" inquired Bendix.

"Well, the Hazelnut Club has Charley Atwood for its president, and Charley is a brother-in-law of Purcell."

"I see," said Bendix. "I suppose Dutch Klein knew this?"

"The Cameron picture's down off his back bar."

"Tell him you told me," advised Bendix, weighing the matter carefully, for of such trifles was political control constructed.

"Is that the worst news I can carry?" demanded the other, disappointed.

"If there's any worse, we'll send it out when the wagon backs up!" responded Bendix dryly.

"All right, captain," agreed the tale-bearer. "Say, can you slip me an ace?"

Bendix slipped him the ace, from a fund provided for that purpose.

"Thanks!" said the thug. "Say, what's the matter with Sledge?"

"None of your business!" snapped Bendix, with a wondering glance at the back room, and he waded through the usual morning line-up with that wonder growing on him. The actions and bearing of Sledge varied by so thin a hair's breadth from day to day, that a notable variation meant something.

He found Sledge standing up, and then he knew that there was something in the wind.

"Get Bozzam!" directed Sledge, and Bendix went straight out to the telephone.

"Get Davis!" directed Sledge, when Bendix came back; and Bendix, vaguely pitying somebody, hurried out to the telephone again.

"Get Feeder!" was the next order. Bendix almost whistled as he hurried out to locate, by phone, the ex-county treasurer, who, for two years, had been drawing a handsome salary from Sledge, for keeping his mouth shut about the public funds scandal.

"Get Gally!" rumbled Sledge, who had not moved from his contemplative post by the window, and Bendix, keeping his growing wonder to himself, and replying with a shrug to the soberly questioning glance of the concerned Phil, phoned for the Sledge leader in the city council.

Sledge, having sent for everybody he needed, was sitting more quietly in his accustomed chair when Bendix returned from this last trip, and was looking with his usual stolidness out of the window, after having donned the fresh red rose, which he had put on religiously three times a day since he had met Molly Marley.

"Council meeting this afternoon?" he asked.

"Two-thirty," answered Bendix.

"How much of the stock is subscribed in the reorganized street railway?"

"Hundred and eighty-five thousand. I got the report just before I came over."

"Get ours on the market. Gum-shoe sales, but do it quick."

"Who's to be soaked—Marley?" guessed Bendix.

"The limit," assented Sledge. "Bendix, what's the worst they could hand me on that public funds case?"

"Two or three years, if they got you going," judged Bendix. "That's dead now, however."

"It's back."

"Has Feeder been talking?"

Sledge nodded.

"Who knows anything?"

"Glider—Marley."

"Hunh!" grunted Bendix, in unconscious imitation of Sledge. "What are you going to do?"

"Call it."

"You don't mean to bring it to a show-down!" protested Bendix. "We can't afford it, with Lansdale and Blake on the bench. Judge Lansdale especially would part with his right arm to toss a harpoon into you."

"Get rid of him."

"I don't see how," worried Bendix. "We've tried for two years to get something on him. He can't be reached, and I don't think it's safe to beat him up."

Sledge pondered that matter weightily, and sighed.

"Give him a big law job."

"We haven't anything fat enough, except the Distillers and Brewers League, but we promised that plum to the governor."

"Give it to Lansdale," ordered Sledge. "I'll send Waver to Switzerland. I want his house, anyhow."

"You promised a consulship to Hoover. It's the only one Washington lets you name."

"Hoover's a nit," declared Sledge, turning slightly toward Bendix, by way of emphasis. "He goes in the discard."

"Good work!" approved Bendix. "Young Bailey Cooper has made a joke of Hoover's leadership. I think Waver

has been counting on this Distillers and Brewers job, though. It takes a good man to fight the dry fad, and Waver knows it."

"He has to go to Switzerland," decided Sledge.

"How about Blake?" asked Bendix.

"We'll take a chance."

Bendix shook his head.

"Blake's against you," he warned. "Besides that, there's an election coming off."

"We lose," Sledge rumbled. "We're due, anyhow."

"I guess you're right," agreed Bendix reluctantly. "So long as we have to lose, we might as well make it a good one. If there's any other scandal about us, we may as well arrange to have it sprung, and get it all cleaned up at once."

"Fix Lansdale to-day," commanded Sledge.

"I'll go see Schwarzman this noon, and, of course, have him offer the job to Lansdale, so he won't imagine it comes from us. Schwarzman, though, didn't want to change his legal department until fall. That won't do, I suppose?"

"To-day," announced Sledge.

"I got you," replied Bendix, rising. "If Lansdale takes the job, he'll have to resign from the bench immediately," and no assent to this being necessary, he hurried out to make an appointment with the president of the Distillers and Brewers League.

Bozzam came, suave, smiling, a more polished gentleman than anybody, but not offensive with it.

"How goes it?" asked Sledge.

"Splendidly," said Bozzam. "The stock's all sold, including our own. We're ready to move on, unless we can put over a really good organization of some sort. We don't want another little one, though. Traction companies are our game."

"Get busy," remarked Sledge.

"With the original traction thought?"

A grunt of assent was Sledge's reply, as he looked out along the high board fence which bound in the narrow area-way. A thing which had once been a

mop leaned in a corner by one of the scantlings, decaying.

Bozzam looked at Sledge for a moment, and, being a gentleman of rare penetration, rightly concluded that his errand was over.

"Good day," he said, and started for the door.

Bendix and a big, blue-eyed man with a square jaw and muscular shoulders, came in, and Bendix introduced the latter to Bozzam as Jim Gally. The two gentlemen exchanged grins as they shook hands, but neither one of them was careless enough to state that they had already met; although, as a matter of fact, Mr. Gally now possessed the exclusive bar privilege at the new amusement park.

"Stick around, Bozzam," said Sledge. "Tom, Bozzam gets his car line. Gally will fix the franchises."

Bendix, although the project and Sledge's resolution were absolutely new to him, never batted an eyelash.

"We'll get together on that at the hotel in about an hour," he told Gally and Bozzam. "Nothing ready to give out to the papers, is there, Sledge?"

"Naw!"

"You'd better explain to Bozzam what you want in the way of routes," suggested Bendix. "The franchises should be passed in secret session, Gally. Is everybody all right?"

"It's a family reunion," declared Gally. "Is that all, Sledge?"

"Wait," said Sledge, and looked out at the mop.

Everybody sat down, and there seemed to be some important topic in abeyance. They indulged in no trifling conversation, but looked out of the window. Bendix ordered drinks, which they consumed silently and solemnly. Sledge evidently had some weighty plan on his mind, for he only drank half his beer.

Davis, of the First National, came in, a pompous man, with a fish-fat double chin and pompous white side whiskers and a white waistcoat. He stood at the other side of the table, but Sledge beckoned him closer, and Davis, wearing an

impenetrable air of mystery, leaned his whiskered ear far down.

"Call Marley's loans," rumbled the boss, in a tone which, at three feet away, sounded like a tuba sawmill.

"Is he shaky?" inquired Davis in a panic-stricken whisper.

"He will be," promised Sledge.

"Why, he owes the bank fifty-five thousand dollars!" returned Davis, more panic-stricken than ever, and his whispering sounded like the exhaust of a safety valve. "I'll go right away and protect the bank. What has happened to him, Mr. Sledge?"

"Nothing yet," stated Sledge. "Sit down, Davis."

Mr. Davis sat down, and the four who had been told to wait looked at each other with growing wonder, and at the impassive big man, who was still drawing inspiration from the decrepit mop.

Five minutes passed. Bendix and Bozzam and Gally sat in comfortable quiet, resting all their faculties, physical, mental, and moral, but Mr. Davis fidgeted audibly. He twiddled his fingers, he fussed with his cravat, he ran slip nooses in his watch cord, he wiped his reading glasses, and put them on and took them off.

Five minutes more passed. Mr. Davis, in desperation, rang the bell for the velvet-footed Adolph, and ordered a drink. In other gatherings Mr. Bozzam would have enlivened the moment with a story, or with conversation and repartee. On occasion, he could have sung a song or recited a poem, or played seven-up, craps, or tiddleywinks, all with the pleasing finish of a professional. Just now, however, he remained as placidly calm as a cake of Swiss cheese.

A step came down the narrow passageway. A rawboned fellow appeared in the doorway. He was tall and big, and wore good clothes. His hands were coarse, and had bulbous finger tips, with extremely broad, stubby nails, but they showed no signs of recent toil. He had a wide mouth and prominent cheek bones and a low forehead. He looked like a retired coal heaver. The exi-

gencies of politics had once made him county treasurer, and since then he had lived in prosperous idleness.

Sledge arose, and walked around to the front of the table.

"Say, Feeder," he growled. "I've been paying you seventy-five a month for two years. That right?"

"Yes," hesitated Feeder, with a puzzled glance at the unusual crowd in the little room.

"What for?" demanded Sledge.

Mr. Feeder smiled ingratiatingly, but paled in the process.

"Campaign work," he replied.

"What for?" demanded Sledge.

"Well—I—" and, more puzzled than ever, he looked around the equally puzzled gathering. Even Bendix was at a loss.

"What for, I say!" suddenly thundered Sledge.

"On the level?" inquired Feeder. "I don't get this, Sledge. I don't see—"

"Tell 'em!"

"Well, if you got to have it—"

He stopped, gave another glance at his audience, and stared at Sledge incredulously.

Sledge advanced a step toward him.

"I said, tell 'em."

"Here goes, then," responded Feeder, exasperated. "For keeping my mouth shut about receiving the public funds interest money for you."

"You're a liar!" boomed Sledge, and, suddenly stepping forward with marvelous agility for so ponderous a man, swung his right arm, the biceps of which was like a thigh, and knocked Feeder straight through the door. "Throw him out," he directed, and sat down.

Bendix accepted that commission as readily as if it had been a suggestion to ring for another drink. A rather heavy man himself, he stepped lightly into the passageway, grabbed Feeder by the collar as he was rising, and punched him in the ear. Phil and Blondy, both gentlemanly bartenders selected for the hardness and limberness of their shoulders, came running back as promptly as fire horses at the sound of the gong.

"Rough toss," explained Bendix briefly, handing his collar hold to Phil.

There was a rattle of chairs and tables, and the crash of two or three glasses interspersed with an occasional smack. There were exclamations from a few of the hangers-on, and a few inadvertent oaths from the astounded Feeder, but Phil and Blondy were voiceless, until, after battering Feeder at the curb until a policeman came up, they turned him over for a wagon call.

"What's the charge?" asked the officer.

"Pink necktie, I think," returned Phil. "But I'll find out," and he ran back to Sledge's room. "Feeder's pinched," he stated. "Want it to stick?"

"Uh-hunk!" grunted Sledge.

"Copper's fussy. He wants to know what's the charge."

Sledge took a slow survey of his witnesses, and the faintest possible suspicion of a twinkle came into his small gray eyes.

"Attempted blackmail," he chuckled.

CHAPTER XIX.

LITTLE HENRY PETERS GETS IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR.

Little Henry Peters, with his morning paper in one hand and his coffee cup in the other, set down the latter so hastily that he bedded it in a griddle cake, and arose from his chair.

"Almost too late!" he groaned, fixing an accusing eye on Mrs. Peters.

"For what?" she quite naturally wanted to know.

"For that stock," he told her. "See! Two hundred and twenty-five thousand out of the two hundred and fifty is already subscribed, and the paper says that the total amount will probably be taken this morning."

"My, my!" sympathized Mrs. Peters, but there was no particular heartiness in her tone. Jessie looked across at her, and smiled brightly.

"Probably before I could get down there with the money it would be all gone," he complained, with his hand on the back of his chair.

"Maybe we made a mistake," con-

ceded Mrs. Peters, buttering one of the cold cakes.

"Aren't you going to finish your breakfast, father?" inquired Jessie, willing, now that the whole thing was settled, to help him ease his burden and relax into the normal.

"While I'm losing a business chance like this?" he demanded. "It isn't too late yet, Jessie. I went to the German Bank the other day, where they carried our property so long while we were paying for it, and made arrangements that we could have the money any minute. They've looked up the title, and the papers are at the bank right now, all ready for us to sign."

"Maybe the stock's all gone," Mrs. Peters only half hopefully suggested.

"We'll find out," he returned, snatching his hat. "Come on!"

Mrs. Peters looked down in dismay at her faded and mended wrapper, which had once cost ninety-eight cents.

"I'm not dressed," she protested.

"That's all right," he complimented her. "You're dressed good enough for me, and it's nobody else's business."

"Father, she simply can't go that way," insisted Jessie.

"She can put on her long coat," he reminded them. "Nobody can tell what you have on underneath."

"She'd know, though," retorted Jessie. "Come on, mother, I'll help you dress."

"Be ready in five minutes, then," directed little Henry, looking at his watch in a fever of impatience, as he realized what golden opportunities were slipping away, minute by minute. The other little Henry Peterses of the city had beaten him to the gold mines, and he was most unhappy.

In fifteen minute, Mrs. Peters, with red eyes, came out of the bedroom, but little Henry did not notice that she had been crying. He opened the door and darted out. There was a car in the next block. Mrs. Peters stopped on the step, and took a longing farewell of the place. She loved it, weatherboard by weatherboard, even to the fancy little cement triangle in the gable, with a

queer pattern of atrociously colored broken glass.

"Hurry up!" called Henry, from the gate. "Do you want to miss this car?"

The car in question was crowded so full that it seemed to bulge, and half a block behind it was another one only half filled. Nevertheless, little Henry crowded his wife on the first one, and watched the fare register click in a satisfaction so profound that it neutralized his discomfort. The conductor, when he took little Henry's fare, passed by a man who had gotten on at the same corner, and Henry wedged out after him to tell him about it. That nickel went to make up his seven per cent and his increase in stock.

They arrived at the bank ten minutes too early, and waited outside the iron gate until it opened. In a trembling hand, Mrs. Peters signed her name in the places pointed out to her, and went home in a daze, but little Henry, richer by four thousand dollars in his bank book, jammed his hat on the back of his head, and hurried over to the office of the street-car company.

"Am I too late to take up any of that new stock?" he eagerly demanded.

"By half an hour," the stock clerk told him, with the necessary insolence of a man who, unaided, has accomplished a huge financial operation. "You want to wake up early to grab traction stock."

Little Henry was miserable.

"It serves me right!" he groaned. "Who took it all?"

"Mail orders mostly," the stock clerk condescended to explain. "We're about six thousand oversubscribed."

Quite crestfallen, little Henry turned away. As he went through the outer office, Hunt followed him.

"I beg your pardon," said Hunt, smiling pleasantly. "Did you wish to buy some stock?"

"Four thousand," answered Henry, with renewed hope.

"Four thousand," repeated Hunt thoughtfully. "Um! I think I can get you that much."

"Thank you!" returned Henry gratefully. "Can you get it right away?"

"At about two o'clock," promised Hunt, looking cautiously back toward the main office. "Give me your address, and I'll send it around to you."

Eagerly and thankfully, little Henry wrote down his address, and Hunt, explaining that the stock was to be secured from a man who was hard up for money, cautioned little Henry to say nothing about it, and glided back into the main office, leaving the odor of extract of heliotrope in his wake.

At two o'clock, little Henry received his forty shares from one John Tucker, and gave his four thousand dollars in exchange. At approximately the same hour, clerks of John Tucker delivered stock to a widow who gave her insurance money for it, a boy who had fallen heir to enough to see him through college, a bricklayer who had worked all his life to save three thousand dollars, and a number of other members of the little Henry Peters class. This was the Sledge stock which had been voted by Attorney John Tucker, and it brought one hundred dollars per share, in cash.

Jessie Peters and Dicky Reynolds came into little Henry's place of business immediately after Henry had secured his long-coveted stock, and found him in the happiest possible state of mind.

"Hello, Dicky," he hailed young Reynolds, with more than the usual cordiality he displayed toward that young man. "I got the stock, Jessie."

"What stock is that?" asked Dicky. "Oh, yes, the new traction. Well, it ought to be good, I guess. I understand they plan some big improvements, and we certainly need them."

"It's the most solid investment in the city," boasted little Henry. "I had to use all my influence to get these forty shares. I don't know whether there's any left, but I'll try, if you'd like some."

"No, thanks!" laughed Dicky, exchanging a glance with Jessie, whereat she blushed. "We're going to buy that house in Willisburg, Jessie and I."

"Well, I'll declare!" exclaimed little Henry, blinking at both of them.

"Yes; that's what we came in to tell you," went on Dicky, slipping his arm

about Jessie's shoulders, and drawing her comfortably to him. "We settled it in Maberly's candy store, about half an hour ago, over an ice-cream soda."

"Well, I'll declare!" repeated little Henry, still dazed.

Jessie took her father's face between her hands, and kissed him.

"It's quite true, father," she assured him, blushing prettily, and turning fond eyes to Dicky. "He asked me to marry him right at a soda fountain. I didn't want to answer there, but he made me, and when I finally said 'Yes,' he leaned right over and kissed me, in front of everybody, and they all laughed, and a Frenchman clapped his hands, and said '*'Voilà!'*'"

Dicky, laughing, stopped that furiously blushing narrative by kissing her again, whereat little Henry, though polite without, was slightly uncomfortable. He had never been so silly in public.

"I hope you will be very happy," he congratulated them, shaking Dicky by the hand. "She is a good girl, Dicky, and you must be very kind to her."

"How could I help it?" returned Dicky, taking Jessie away from her father, and restoring her to that snug place against his side.

"Now let's talk business a little bit," invited Father Peters. "You're a young man yet, Dicky, and you would be wise to take another man's advice. You mentioned to me the other day that you have a little money, and I want to see you invest it wisely."

"I made every cent of it myself," asserted Dicky, with a sidelong glance, to see if Jessie had the proper pride in him. She had.

"Put it to work, like I do mine," promptly urged Henry. "Make your money make money. I'll call up my friend, and see if I can't get you some of that stock," and he started for the phone.

"Don't do it!" called Dicky, so decisively and sharply that his future father-in-law turned on him, offended. "That traction stock may be good, but my money stays in the West End Bank until we buy and furnish our home."

"All right," gave up little Henry. "Some day you'll realize the value of an older man's advice."

"I suppose so," granted Dicky easily. "We have to go up to the house now, and break the news to our mamma."

Jessie squeezed his arm adorably for saying "our mamma," and they took a car straight up to the Peters' home, where they found their mamma baking cookies for Minnie's baby.

"Hello, Dicky," she greeted him, wiping her hands on her apron to shake hands with Dicky, and beaming up at him with the motherly warmth he always inspired in her. "Did you get that thread, Jessie?"

Jessie colored.

"I—I forgot it," she falteringly confessed.

"Why, you went down for nothing else," protested Mrs. Peters.

"She met me," smilingly explained Dicky. "Kiss me!" and he held down his puckered lips.

She shrank from him, as if he had flaunted a spider in her face. She blushed until the white parting of her hair was red clear back to her knot, and she looked at him so distressedly and so helplessly that Jessie felt a sudden sharp tugging of compassion for her.

"Don't, Dicky!" she protested. "It isn't fair."

"That's right," agreed Dicky nicely. "We'll sit down and talk it over," and, placing himself comfortably in the big, sag-seated, splint rocking-chair, with the red-worsted cushion in it, he calmly drew Jessie on his lap. "You see, Mamma Peters, having nothing else to do on the first of next month, Jessie and I have decided to get married."

Mamma Peters slowly sat down, and stared at them for a long, long minute, as if they had been their own ghosts; then she suddenly put her gnarled, red, old hands to her eyes, and began crying.

Jessie was on her knees beside her immediately, and had that gray head bent on her shoulder, and petted it, and tears came into her own eyes.

"Don't you like me for a son?" de-

manded the apparently much-abused voice of Dicky.

She looked up at him, smiling through her tears, and then she and Jessie both laughed, half hysterically, at him.

"Come here and I'll kiss you," offered Mrs. Peters.

Dicky was very prompt to accept that offer; then, seeing that it was positively necessary for her to cry a little longer, he placed a chair for Jessie by her side, and walked outdoors to look at the struggling chrysanthemums.

When he returned, Mrs. Peters was asking eagerly:

"How many rooms has it?"

"Seven," replied Jessie happily. "We're going up to see it Sunday. We leave here on the six-o'clock train in the morning, and get back at ten at night."

"How is it arranged?" asked Mrs. Peters, appealing to Dicky. "Your new house we're talking about."

"I guessed it," laughed Dicky, drawing his chair directly in front of them, and reaching over into Jessie's lap for her hand. "You step off a wide porch into a big square reception room. To the right of that is the parlor, with wide folding doors. Straight ahead of the reception hall is the dining room. The stairway goes up between the parlor and the kitchen. There's a pantry between the kitchen and the dining room, and a door for ice opening onto the back porch. Upstairs there's three bedrooms and a bath."

"How about clothes closets?" asked Mamma Peters, arranging that house in her mind's eye, and walking through it critically.

"A big closet in every bedroom, and one in the hall. The cellar stairway opens from the kitchen. There's a cellar under the whole house. Hot-air furnace, hot and cold water, electric lights, and gas."

"Any hard-wood floors?" asked Jessie, with her mind on rugs.

"Borders downstairs, except in the kitchen," answered Dicky promptly.

"That's nice," approved Mamma Peters, with a sigh. "But the house is

too big for Jessie to take care of all by herself."

"The hired girl's already picked out," Dicky assured her, patting Jessie's hand.

"You must have been quite certain you were going to marry me," that young lady chided, straightening up, in pretended offended dignity.

"Of course I was," he retorted. "Weren't you?"

Naturally she blushed at that, and punished his hand, and he kissed her, and Mamma Peters almost cried again.

"It's mighty nice to move right into your own house," she declared. "I guess you don't know, Dicky, what a woman's own home is to her. It makes her feel safe. I think I'd die if we were to lose this place."

A paper boy raced up halfway to the house, and threw a twisted copy of the *Blade* against the door, and jumped the fence. With the habit of a man, Dicky went out for the paper, and opened it. His face paled as he read the staring big headlines, but he stuck the paper quietly in his pocket, and talked Jessie for a solid half hour longer with Mamma Peters, then he accepted an invitation to dinner, and Jessie walked down to the gate with him.

"I'm afraid there is bad news in the paper," he said; and pulled it from his pocket. "The city council has granted franchises to a new street-car company, which will parallel the present lines. It is backed by Sledge, and that means that it will have advantages enough to render the old company almost inoperative. The stock of the old company, in the two hours since the news was known on the board of trade, has dropped from par to thirty-five. People who own it are panic-stricken."

Jessie's lips turned pale.

"Poor mother!" she cried. "Dicky, she knew it!"

"Your father mortgaged this house to buy some more of this stock, didn't he?"

"Yes," she acknowledged. "It was a dreadful mistake! Mother didn't want him to. We'll never do that, will we, Dicky?"

"Nev-er!" he promised, pressing her

hand. "The deed is to be in your name."

"All you'd have to do would be to ask for it," she smiled fondly up at him.

"Also, I might beat you," he laughed. "No, Jessie, dear, your house—" He stopped abruptly, and held the paper closer. His eyes had been resting idly upon a minor headline which suddenly seemed to mean something. "*West End Bank gone under!*" he read; then he read the line again with startled interest, and read the item clear through. "Why, Jessie, that's the bank which has my six thousand dollars," he explained. "It's mixed up, too, in this rotten street-car deal. I've lost my money! We can't have any house!"

CHAPTER XX.

FRANK MARLEY DISCOVERS A GREAT TEAM.

Molly stopped singing as her father called her into his den. She hardly recognized his voice, and his face was so drawn and pale that she was startled.

"What's the matter, father? Are you ill?" she asked, deeply concerned.

"Not at all," he assured her. "A slight headache. Molly, I've been thinking about your future all night, and I am very much worried about you. Bert has proven himself thoroughly incapable. His fine old family blood does not seem to support him in a crisis."

"Did you expect anything else of old family blood?" she demanded, smiling. "I didn't."

"As your father I cannot help being concerned," replied Mr. Marley. "Bert has done nothing but whine and make weak threats, and stay half intoxicated ever since Sledge shook him away from the complacent safety of his few thousands."

"I've given him two weeks to get over the shock," she lightly answered. "He'll come up all waxed and curled."

"His time's almost up," her father pointed out. "Molly, I think Sledge proved a very good case against Bert. He called him a pinhead."

Molly wanted to snicker, but she was indignant instead.

"That's better than being a fathead," she retorted. "That's what Bert calls Sledge. It seems to me that they're about even."

"That's where they stop being even," declared Marley. "Sledge threatened to break Bert, and did it. Bert threatened to expose Sledge, and Sledge beat him to it."

"That's my fault," she half angrily acknowledged. "I bragged."

"Bert led you to think you might," he countercharged. "He even had me believing that I could defy Sledge; and it can't be done, Molly. The man's too big, too decisive, and too fearless. The minute he found that Bert, and, through him, you and I, knew that Feeder would prove Sledge's guilt in the public funds case, he sent for Feeder, knocked him down, had him beaten half insensible, and arrested for attempted blackmail."

"He isn't just instantaneous—he's immediate," laughed Molly. "It was a fool thing to do, though. Feeder has exposed him, and saved us the trouble, and Sledge probably will go to the penitentiary, as I told him he would."

"You have innocent ideas," kindly observed her father. "Bert probably encourages you in them, but it is my duty to warn and protect you. Here is exactly what will happen: Feeder will go to the penitentiary for the crime of not having kept his mouth shut. Sledge will be indicted by the grand jury, but the case will never come to trial. He has appointed half the judges on the bench, and the other half are afraid of him. His lawyers will fight, from court to court, on one technicality after another, until election is over, and then the public will forget all about it. You can't fight a man like that."

"I can be the one human being in the world he can't order around," she smilingly insisted. "What do you want me to do—marry him?"

"Yes," was the unexpected reply.

"Great goodness!" laughed Molly. "Are you bluffed, too?"

"Worse!" he told her, rising, and walking up and down in the few short

paces the length of the room allowed him. He had a crumpled newspaper in his hand, and now he threw it on the table. "Do you want to be turned homeless into the street?"

"In the shivering snow, with a little red shawl over my head?" she giggled. "No, father; pray Heaven, no!"

"It isn't a joke," he insisted, stopping before her, and now the mask of constraint dropped from his face. "Molly, you know that he threatened to break me. Well, he has done it."

"Nonsense!" she replied, unable to conceive of that condition in its actuality, since there was no halt in their luxury. "It is impossible."

"It is a fact," he stated, as calmly as he could. "At the various banks which Sledge controls I had obligations, which I thought were only nominally considered to be call loans, aggregating a hundred thousand dollars. These were protected by my traction stock. Last week the banks called them. I recently received eighty-seven thousand five hundred dollars in cash on a certain deal, and I had considerable trouble to raise the additional twelve thousand five hundred dollars. I had to deposit twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of my stock to secure it, and yesterday I had to put up twenty-five thousand more."

"But why?" asked Molly, sitting down and considering the matter seriously for the first time.

"Because, in one day, merely by announcing that he was financially backing a competing company, Sledge lowered the value of my stock from a hundred dollars a share to thirty-five. That same announcement broke the West End Bank, has crippled two others, and made paupers of a hundred or more small stockholders."

"How horrible!" she exclaimed. "The poor people!" Then the wonder of such power came to her. "With just a word," she mused. "But, father, I don't see yet how he could do it. You say that your stock was worth a hundred dollars a share yesterday morning, and only thirty-five now?"

He nodded his head in confirmation.

"Each share of stock represents a cer-

tain part ownership of the street-railway company, doesn't it?"

Again he nodded.

"Well, the road is still there," she argued. "You still own as much of it as you did before. Why, father, Sledge has just scared everybody. Your stock will be worth what it was, or nearly so, after this panic is over. Even competition can't keep you from hauling people, and making money at it."

"It can keep us from hauling enough to make anything like our previous profits, and earning capacity is what gives stock its value. That is not the big trouble just now, however. I have a seventy-thousand-dollar mortgage on this place, which is all it would bring at a forced sale, although it is worth double the money. It expires on the first of the month, and Sledge knows it. It is held at one of his banks, and it will not be extended."

"You'll have to pay it," she surmised.

"What with?" he demanded. "At the present prices, at which, by the way, nobody cares to buy, it would take every share of my stock to pay off that mortgage. I would be absolutely penniless."

"Why don't some of you good business men get after Sledge?"

"It can't be done," he confessed. "Molly——"

"I know what you're going to say," she interrupted him. "I won't do it. I'm going to marry Bert if it breaks everybody!"

"That would be a very commendable spirit if you loved him," he quietly remarked. "I don't think you do, however. Nor do I, by any means, believe Bert capable of a love worth the sacrifice of everything. The Maryland Gliders do not constitute a universe in themselves, nor is much happiness to be found in a marriage which is a social triumph. I'm afraid, Molly, that you're stubborn, and will not let yourself criticize your own mind."

"Of course I'm stubborn!" she admitted, as if that were a virtue. "The date is set, and it will stay set. Do all

you men have to give up because I won't marry somebody? Is that the way your brilliant business is conducted? I won't be part of a bargain. You urge me not to marry Bert because you decide I don't love him, and you urge me to marry a man who can bring your stock to par. Father, you're scared. Can't you think of any way out of your fluctuation but having me marry Sledge?"

"He loves you," he told her, with conviction. "Sledge never gives up."

"That's why he wins," she asserted. "He tries everything. Why don't you? Why don't you announce that the new company is illegal, and that it will be fought in the courts? Have the newspaper say it can't build its lines, then the price of your stock will go up again. Why don't you trade some of your stock for stock in the new company? Why don't you threaten to stop all your cars, until the mayor or somebody makes the new company build its lines away from your street? The new company couldn't have cars running for six months; and there'd be a riot, unless the authorities did what you wanted them to? Why don't you go down and shoot Sledge, or hire it done? He would! In fact, he'd have done it by this time. I know! Why don't you go to the men who are getting up this company, and see what you can find out? Then you can begin some planning. I wish I were a man!"

Frank Marley sat staring at her. She was standing, tall, straight, and with flushed cheeks, her eyes shining. He passed his hand over his brow.

"No wonder Sledge wants to marry you!" he involuntarily complimented her. "You'd make a great team!"

She laughed, and relented.

"I don't intend to be mean, but you drive me to it," she said, and kissed him and patted him on the head. "Go down to these people, and see what you can find out," she counseled.

"I think I will," he concluded, with a drowning man's desperation. "Molly, you're a gritty one."

Bill Heenan, Postman

By William Slavens McNutt

Author of "His Brothers," "Modest," Etc.

A vigorous story of a Yukon miner whose indomitable courage was backed by three great bulwarks—a perfect nervous system trained to familiarity with dangerous situations since his early boyhood; a superabundance of the danger passion; and a philosophy of life and death that was as serviceable as it was crude.

THE inside of the little eight-by-ten log cabin was white with frost save for a radius on the wall of perhaps three feet around the red-hot wood stove at the foot of the two bunks, built one above the other, against the wall on one side of the cabin. The frost beard was long and thick; by the eaves of the low roof in the three corners farthest from the stove it had grown and matted until it was like a thick cobweb across some long-neglected corner in an old building.

Big Bill Heenan sat on a small box by the stove, dully playing solitaire on the top of another box in front of him.

In the lower of the two bunks a man lay, muffled to the chin with thick blankets, mumbling weakly in a delirious sleep. The skin on his sunken cheeks showed through his sparse, dark beard with the sepulchral white of death.

In one corner two big Malemutes slept, with their long, wolflike noses festing on their paws.

The drone of a blizzard, roaring down from off the Arctic Ocean, whose shores lay not quite four hundred miles to the northward, hummed indistinctly in Heenan's ears; muffled by the thick shroud of snow that lay over and about the little shack, it sounded like the thunderous rumble of a far-distant surf.

One of the dogs whined dismally in

the throes of a dream, and Heenan woke him from it with a curse and a convenient frying pan. The dog's sharp yelp startled the delirious man in the bunk into consciousness; his lids slowly lifted from his dulled eyes, and he struggled painfully to a sitting posture.

"Bill," he called weakly. "Oh, Bill!" Heenan turned to him. "Hello!" he said. "Want some more broth?"

The sick man shook his head. "No, not now. Bill, how long you been here?"

"I dunno. I ain't got no watch, an' yours ain't runnin'; been about three days, I reckon."

"Is it—is it still storming?" Bill stared. "Is it still—— Can't ye hear it?"

The man in the bunk shook his head dazedly. "I—I don't know. There's funny noises in my head all—all the time. I—I can't tell whether—— Bill! Bill, I'm—I'm dying!"

Heenan lit a sliver of paper on the red-hot stove and applied the flame to the bowl of his cold pipe. "U-m-m-m, mebbe," he assented judicially. "Ye do look like it, but I've seen them that looked worse pull through. Never can tell."

"I am!" the other wailed, beating weakly on the blankets with his skeleton hands. "I am, I tell you! I know I am. I'm—I'm dying!"

Heenan shrugged. "I reckon you

ought to know," he agreed. "If ye can hang on till this storm blows out, though, I'll make a try at gettin' ye down to the fort. They's a doc down there might be able to do somethin' for ye. It's a hundred an' fifty mile—I ought to be able to make it with ye in three days."

The sick man wagged his head hopelessly and sank back in his bunk. "It's no use," he whimpered. "I'm done for. I know it."

Heenan shrugged again, and turned his attention once more to the solitaire layout on the box in front of him. He had reached the shack about three days previous, just ahead of the storm that was still raging. He had come up into the arctic from Circle City, where he had been wintering on the strength of a rumor that a man he had grubstaked the previous summer had made a strike and was wintering on the Sheeniek.

Instead, he had found Jack Kelcey, sick unto death with some sort of a fever and barely able to keep his fire alive by crawling to and from the wood-box on his hands and knees.

Heenan knew Kelcey slightly, and disliked him a great deal. The man had been in and around Fort Yukon for four or five years; had washed up enough in a few small strikes to keep himself outfitted from year to year; and, more than that, neither Heenan nor any one else in the country knew of him.

Heenan had fed and nursed the man as best he could, and his instinctive dislike of him steadily grew. There was no way to help him except to get him to the doctor at the fort, and that was impossible until the storm blew out; wherefor Heenan played solitaire.

The offending Malemute curled up beside his sleeping fellow, and dozed with one suspicious eye half open and alert for further missiles.

Ten minutes passed in silence. Heenan got blocked with a scant half of his cards played, cursed, shuffled the deck, and began a new game. Suddenly the man in the bunk screamed with all his might.

The two dogs bounded to their feet, bristling and snarling. Heenan whirled about, covering Kelcey with a long, blue

Colt. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

Kelcey shrank against the wall, cowering at sight of the menacing gun. "Don't—don't point that at me, Bill," he pleaded. "You—you wouldn't shoot me, Bill? You—What for?"

Heenan slid the gun back in its holster. "I ain't shootin' ye, am I?" he said. "I ain't takin' any chances, though. Sick men's funny sometimes in this man's land. Pardner o' mine trappin' with me over on the Pelly one winter got sick. I nursed him for two months, an' just before he blew out he tried to slip a knife into me. Clean crazy! What are you yellin' about?"

"Bill, I'm—I'm dying."

"Well, we all got to croak some day."

"But like this, Bill! Like a dog! Up here in a dirty—And you! You"—he threw out his wasted hands with a gesture of repugnance—"you treat me worse than you'd treat a dog! I'm dying, and—and you play cards!"

"Well, what d'ye want me to do? I'll do anything I can for ye. Ain't I feedin' ye? Ain't I takin' care o' ye the best I can? If ye can last out till the storm blows over I'll lug ye down to the fort. They ain't nothin' else anybody can do 'cept pray—an' God knows I can't do that."

The sick man buried his face in the blankets and sobbed. "Oh, Bill, I'm dying, and—and I'm afraid! Help me, Bill! Help me!"

With an exclamation of mingled disgust and pity Heenan sat down on the edge of the bunk and laid his big hand on Kelcey's heaving shoulders. "I can't help ye to die, pardner," he said. "I'll do all I can to keep ye alive, but nobody can help ye die. That's one trail ye got to mush over alone. I don't reckon ye need to be scared of it; everybody 't ever lived 's been over it; might as well be scared o' eatin'—goin' to sleep—wakin' up. Now don't be a fool, Kelcey. You ain't the only man that ever died. It's just a part o' the game. Play it out. Come on, now, behave!"

Kelcey caught Bill's arm in a frantic clutch. "But you—you don't understand, Bill," he gibbered. "I'm dying

now, and—and I killed a man once. I—I killed a man. I—”

“An’ ye think ye see his ghost hangin’ around somewheres,” Heenan finished for him. “Don’t get nutty. —If they was anything in that stuff, I’d have a whole troop trottin’ round after me. I had to clean up a whole outfit once back in the Black Hills. Five of ‘em. They tried to stick me up for a stake I had on me, an’ I got ‘em. Man’s got a right to take care o’ himself.”

“I know, but—— Bill, listen. Bill, I didn’t—didn’t have to do this. I—I didn’t have to do it.”

Heenan rose. “Oh, you didn’t, hey? Well—it’s done, an’ talkin’ won’t undo it. No use hashin’ it up. Forget it.” He sat down on the box and resumed his solitaire. After a minute Kelcey spoke again.

“Bill.”

“Well?”

“Bill, do you think there’s any hereafter?”

“What, d’ye mean? This heaven thing?”

“Yes.”

Heenan stirred impatiently. “How do I know?”

“But—Bill.”

“Well?”

“I—I want to talk to you, Bill.”

“Fire ahead.”

“I—I did an—an awful wrong once, Bill. I want you to—to square it up for me. I’m—I’m afraid! I—— Listen, Bill. This man I—I killed—it was in the back room of a saloon down in Seattle. After I did it, I—I got away. There was another man found him. He was in a room right next to—to us. They thought he did it. They—they didn’t hang him, Bill. I’d have confessed if they’d been going to—to hang him, Bill. I would. I—maybe you know the man they arrested, Bill. He—Barney West, the——”

“Barney West, the fur buyer? You mean you’re the guy that crooked Neil Denton? You? Why, Barney got life for that. He’s—— Why, that’s eight years ago. He’s been—— Go on.”

“Yes, eight years, Bill. Barney saw me. He told them it was me did it; but

he couldn’t prove it; couldn’t prove I was even in town. I had a date with Neil. Came in the—the back way. Nobody but Barney saw me. They—they sent him up, but his wife—he told his wife—she’s been hunting me ever since. She traced me to Chicago, down to New Orleans. She almost found me there. Then I came up here. I——”

“An’ Barney’s been in the pen for eight years ‘cause—— An’ him with a wife!”

“I know, Bill. I know; but I’m dying now, Bill. Don’t——”

“It’s time you did. Eight years! Why——”

“I know. But I always meant to square it up, Bill. I did: I——”

“Square eight years in the pen? Ye couldn’t square ten minutes o’ that kind o’ hell if ye were to live a million years! I knowed Barney. He used to buy furs off o’ me down Wrangle way in the old days. A straight up-an’-down guy he was, too. Square eight——”

“But I can square it, Bill! I can! You’ve got—got to help me. I’m dying now, but—you help me—I’ll square it. Look here.” He reached under the blanket and drew out a caribou-skin wallet. “See here—a letter—inside. I wrote it—a long time ago. It’s a confession. I’ve written the whole thing—just as it happened. It will——”

Heenan snatched the wallet from Kelcey’s feeble clutch. “A confession, hey? All right, son, I’ll take care of it. An’ now if you’ll only get well! Oh, you dirty pup, if I could only make you live! If I could only watch ‘em kick you into Barney’s cell when he comes out! You get well an’ come along o’ me down below, an’ after you’ve done eight years there in the pen where ye put Barney, ye can come around and ask me if ye got a chance to square it!”

A new terror flared in Kelcey’s eyes. “No, no, Bill! No! If I don’t die, Bill—give me a chance to—to—— No. I’m dying—I know it. You see that Mrs. West gets—that letter. Give it to her yourself. Don’t—don’t trust it to anybody else. I want to—to be sure she gets it. The address—on the big envelope inside. Fourteen-eighty-six

Sixth Avenue—Seattle. My poke—under my pillow—seven or eight hundred in it. Take it for the trip. Find her, and give it to her yourself, Bill. Don't trust it to the mail. Not up here. Maybe it gets through and maybe not—you always get through, Bill. I want to know—she's going to get it, Bill. Promise!"

"She'll get it."

Kelcey sank back in the bunk, panting. "Thanks, Bill. That—that'll square it. Won't it?"

"Eight years in the pen?"

"But I'm dying now, Bill. I've only—got a few—hours at the most. I want to know—that I've squared it—before I go. I have—haven't I?"

"Ye have not! Say, listen to me, you dyin' man. Ye say yourself ye croaked one guy when ye didn't need to. They ain't many things worse'n that; but one of 'em's lettin' another man go to the pen for it—an' him with a wife! Ye dtick out an' keep your mouth shut for eight years. Then, when you're right sure you're croakin' an' the law can't get at ye, ye get scared 'cause ye think mebbe there's a God, an' a devil, an' all them things, an' ye loosen up with this confession. Ye ain't tryin' to square Barney no more'n ye ever did. You're tryin' to play safe. Say, I dunno nothin' about this heaven-an'-hell thing; but hear me. If they is a God, an' I was Him—you'd roast! That's what I got to say to you, ye dyin' man! Don't come bellerin' to me for sympathy 'cause you're about done. Seein' ye weren't born dead, I reckon dyin's about the best stunt you'll ever pull off. Now, if you got some dyin' to do, you get busy an' do it, an' don't talk to me, or I'll send ye into the happy land with a black eyé. That's all!"

He slipped the wallet into an inner pocket of his jacket, sat down on the box, picked up the deck of cards, and began another game of solitaire. An hour passed. Kelcey mumbled unintelligibly. The two Malemutes in the corner slept. Heenan played solitaire. Suddenly Kelcey screamed horribly; then there was the thud of a relaxed body on the bunk, and—silence. The

dogs whined and cuddled close, cowering.

Heenan rose, stepped to the bunk, and pulled the blanket over the thing that lay there. "B-r-r-r-r-r!" he chattered, with a sudden, irrepressible shudder. "I always did hate to watch a mutt croak. It gives me the shivers."

He fed the two dogs, climbed into the upper bunk, and went to sleep. When he awoke it was perfectly quiet in the little cabin, and very cold. He lit the candles, started the fire, put a few slices of bacon in the frying pan, and set on the coffeepot. Then he climbed up to the little square window above the door and forced aside the sliding board shutter that was over it, disclosing a solid wall of snow. He dug into it with his arm, and a large quantity cascaded down over his shoulders, leaving a tunnel to the top of the drift about two feet above the window.

Heenan forced himself through and scrambled out on top of the bank. The sky was clear, and a three-quarter moon rode high. The air seemed brittle with cold. Heenan nodded with a satisfied air.

"Good mushin'," he said, and slid back into the cabin.

A half an hour later he hoisted the two dogs up through the window and out onto the snow bank, scrambled out after them, and hauled up his pack, a small, lightly loaded sledge, and lastly the body of the dead man. This he carried out on the snow over the frozen river, dug a hole with his snowshoes clear to the ice, and buried it where it would be carried away with the opening up of the river. Then he went back to the cabin, hitched the dogs, tightened the straps on his snowshoes, and straightened up to look about him for a moment.

Just below was the silent, frozen course of the Sheeniek River. Not quite four hundred miles due north was the nearest shore line of the Arctic Ocean. One hundred and fifty miles west was the Canadian boundary line. A hundred due south was the arctic circle. One hundred and fifty southwest was,

Fort Yukon, on the Yukon River. A thousand miles to the southwest was Valdez, the nearest open port where it was possible to get a boat for "below" before the latter part of May. Some twenty-five hundred miles to the south lay Seattle.

Heenan spat, took a deep breath, slipped a lead trace over his shoulders, stepped out in front of his dogs, and started for there. Started for fourteen-eighty-six Sixth Avenue, Seattle, twenty-five hundred miles away. A thousand miles of the distance over the snow, across a great mountain range, to be negotiated with no assistant agent to the two big legs he stood on.

"Hi-i-i-yah!" he sang out. "Come on, ye Malermutes! Mush on!" And, leaning into the trace, out ahead of the lead dog, enveloped in a swirl of fine snow, big Bill Heenan swung out, Seattle bound, with a letter for Mrs. Barney West.

Three days later he mushed into the little settlement at Fort Yukon on the arctic circle. The day he arrived there was the fourteenth of February. He stopped at the fort for an eight-hour sleep, and on the fifteenth started down the frozen Yukon for Eagle. This was the easiest part of his journey, and he reached Eagle on the twentieth. At Eagle, with five hundred miles of his journey behind him, he stopped for one sleep, bought twenty pounds of dried salmon for his dogs, and, leaving the valley of the Yukon, swung off across country to the southwest, headed for Valdez, five hundred miles away.

On the twenty-seventh he toiled over Mentasta Pass in the Nutzotin Mountains, halfway from Eagle to Valdez. On the summit of Mentasta one of the dogs faltered, lay down, and rolled over on its back, yelping weakly; utterly whipped in spirit and flesh by the seventeen days' grind at Heenan's moccasined heels that trod the snow—up and on. Up and on. Hour after hour. Day after day. Driven by an energy that seemed mechanical in its tirelessness. Heenan shot him, rehitched the remaining dog, and mushed on.

On the twenty-ninth, while crossing a minor glacier along the headwaters of the Copper River, near its junction with the Gakona, the sled and the remaining dog crashed through a treacherous snow roof over a crevasse. Heenan—in the lead, as usual—had just gained the farther side when the roof gave way. He whirled about as the dog and sledge dropped, ducked out of the noose of the trace that ran about the back of his neck and under his armpits, and fell with his head and half of his body hanging over the crumbling snow edge of the deadly pit that resounded with the ricochet of the falling dog and sledge.

Slowly he squirmed backward out of danger, got to his feet, dusted the snow out of his parka hood, and, minus grub and outfit, started on for Valdez, one hundred and fifty miles away.

Three days later—the third of March—he reached the road house on the Lowe, a scant day's travel from Valdez. His eyes burned with an unnatural brightness. His belt circled his gaunt abdomen six holes short of where he usually buckled it. His speech was thick and halting; but he walked steady and stood erect.

At the road house he put in an hour eating all the meals he had missed since he lost his grub, slept four hours, and started on for Valdez.

He plodded into the town on the afternoon of the fourth, heard the warning whistle of the *Bertha*, and ran for the docks. He stumbled up the gangplank just as they were preparing to pull it in, and sought the purser.

"Gimme a stateroom," he said. "I'm goin' to Seattle. I want a room to myself if ye got it—an' listen you. Don't let one o' these what-ye-may-call-'em's that come around an' call ye for meals do any bangin' on my door. I want to sleep. An' when I get done sleepin' I want to start right in an' sleep some more."

"Gee! You do look tough at that," the purser sympathized. "I bet you had a hard trip, hey?"

"No—oh, no, 'twan't bad. I was in a kind of a hustle, an' I didn't sleep a lot, that's all."

"Where did you come from?" the purser queried as he led Heenan to his room.

Bill waved his hand in a vague gesture. "Oh, in back a piece," he said inconsequentially.

Heenan had conquered the long trail; but the bar aboard the *Bertha* was too much for him. The tremendous energy in him that could wear out a wolf dog demanded resistance, shock, lavish expenditure of itself, and it knew liquor for a worthy foe. His wonderful body stood the devitalizing drag of the whisky that he deluged it with, as it had stood the strain of the trail, but his brain did not.

He was cunning, was Heenan, and shrewd—as a fox is cunning and shrewd. His indomitable courage was backed with three great bulwarks—a perfect nervous system trained to familiarity with dangerous situations since his early boyhood; a superabundance of the danger passion; and a philosophy of life and death that was as serviceable as it was crude.

This last stamped his courage as greater than animal; but it was the philosophy of a child; a child who had dealt much with situations elementally grave but never complex; and the brain that evolved it was the brain of a child. Aboard the *Bertha* Heenan drank himself into idiocy, just as a young boy told to run for a doctor might run himself to the point of exhaustion, and then, meeting a chum, stop for an hour to play marbles.

Heenan walked down the gangplank in Seattle as drunk as it was possible for him to become; erect, steady of body, and as empty of wits as any idiot. The whisky had washed the slate of his memory clean. His identity, his mission, everything was a blank. He strolled aimlessly up toward Yesler way a strange figure on the city street in his moccasins and furs. A woman in a hallway by a saloon a block from the docks called to him. Heenan smiled vacuously, and followed her.

It was raining. It beat down on

Heenan's face in fitful gusts. He wanted desperately to continue the sleep that the rain had only half waked him from. Let it rain. He didn't care. He stirred and rolled over on his face with an exasperated grunt. Something struck him heavily in the ribs, and a loud-shouted curse penetrated the fog of sleep that hazed his brain. He opened his eyes and struggled dazedly to his knees.

A man stood in front of him holding a bucket of water. He laughed, and emptied it over Heenan's head. Heenan grabbed the bucket and smashed the grinning man in the face with it. The fellow dropped, and Heenan looked about; looked at the deck, rail, and rigging of a small sailing vessel; and then all around at the horizon line. The sky was clear, the sun was shining, and there was no land in sight.

A blow on the back of the head staggered him, and he whirled about to confront a light-haired, heavy-set six-footer with a short iron bar in his hand.

Heenan sprang at him, and the two clinched and went to the deck together. After a moment, Heenan's right hand flashed up, clutching the iron bar. He brought it down square across the nose of the man under him, and got to his feet. A stubby, bow-legged man with a square-cut, bristly beard stepped in front of him, covering him with a short-barreled revolver.

"That'll be all of that," the bearded man ordered. "Another move and I'll let you smell of what's in this. Come, now—drop that."

Heenan sullenly dropped the bar. "Well, who are you, an' what—" he began.

"I happen to be the captain of this ship," the other interrupted him. "Captain Wells, of the whaler *Minnie H.*, bound for the Arctic Ocean on a two years' cruise. And do you know who you are? I'll tell you—and don't let me have to tell you twice. You're William Roberts, a green hand signed on for the cruise. You may think you're somebody else, but that's a delusion it won't be healthy for you to have while you're aboard this ship. One more thing—by

the way you've handled my mates I judge you're not familiar with ship's discipline. It's this: Do what you're told, and do it p. d. q. Learn that. Whatever my mates can't hammer into you I'll shoot into you. Understand?"

A sudden terror clutched Heenan's heart, and he tore open his hair-seal vest and felt in the inner pocket. The letter in the skin wallet was there, along with a plug of Westover and two small tintypes of his mother that he always carried with him. He quickly searched himself further. His gun, his poke, everything of apparent value that he had had was gone.

"Well?" said the captain. "Do you understand?"

Heenan raised his eyes and stared at him levelly. "Yes," he said shortly.

"Yes what?"

Heenan blinked. "Yes what? What d'ye mean?"

"What do I mean? Say 'sir,' you blithering idiot!"

"Sir?" said Heenan. "Sir? Why, what—" His eyes lit with comprehension, and then blazed with anger. "I wouldn't say 'sir' to the king o' England, an' ten like him. What d'ye think I am? I ain't—"

"Mr. Marshall."

"Yes, sir?" The man Heenan had knocked out with the bucket answered the captain's call.

"Mr. Marshall, smash his face till he says 'sir.' If he makes a move to lay a hand on you I'll wing him."

Marshall stepped forward with evident relish of the cowardly task he had been set. The veins in Heenan's forehead swelled with the suppression of the impotent anger in him. "Wait! Wait!" he stuttered. "I—I—yes—s-sir."

"Ah!" the captain approved. "You learn quicker than I expected. I know your breed. You're one of these old prospectors—trappers—all 'round frontiersmen down out of the North. A stubborn class of men. I expect to go after furs a bit next winter up around the mouth of the Mackenzie, so we may be able to make good use of you then. In the meantime take care you don't require a second lesson. Get on back

for'a'd there. Mr. Marshall, help Mr. Larsen to his cabin. I fancy his face will need some doctoring—yes."

Marshall lifted the man Heenan had struck with the bar and led him away. Heenan stumbled forward and down into the dirty little fo'c'stle. A great weariness dragged at his body and his brain was dizzy with confusion. A little wide-lipped Irishman was sitting on one of the bunks darning a ragged sock. "How long since we left Seattle?" Heenan asked.

"Sure, we sailed two days ago," the little fellow answered. "Mon, ye're a harse," he continued admiringly. "An' a brass harse at that. I was in Sheeny Mike's, an' still sober enough to look about me whin they fed ye the dope. Foive glasses o' doped booze I watched ye drink wid me own eyes, an' set straight in yer chair wid yer eyes wide open an' yell for more. Mon, ye swally'd enough dope to kill tin min an' a stone dog! But whin ye did buckle under—ah, but ye was under to stay! Three toimes before this they hod ye out o' yer bunk an' doused ye an' man-handled ye about the deck, an' niver so much as a groan out o' ye until this marnin'."

Heenan sat down on the side of a bunk. "Shanghaied, hey?" he said. "Aboard of a dog-gone ship! Say, me—I hate the smell o' salt water just 'cause ships sail on it. I hate fish 'cause they go out in ships to catch 'em. I hate a canvas tent 'cause it makes me think of a sail. Say, a sailor's the only thing in the world I hate worse'n I hate a ship. A sailor. Me. A green hand signed aboard a whaler for a two years' cruise! Say, look at me, you. I look like a man, don't I? Sure I do, but I ain't. I'm a sailor."

He stretched out on the bunk and groaned.

"Signed on for a two years' cruise, an' Barney in the pen. Oh, ye drunken bum! An' him with a wife!"

One of the crew entered, and laughed loudly at the big man stretched on the bunk. "Wouldn't say 'sir,' wouldn't ye? Thought ye was too good to talk like good seagoin' men, hey? Too proud,

hey? Huh! Ye said it, didn't ye? I guess ye learnt somethin' pretty quick."

Heenan opened his eyes and looked at the jeering man. "You ain't a captain, are ye?" he asked. "Nor a mate? An' they won't hang me if I frown at ye? No!" He swung his feet over the side of the bunk and sat up. "I ain't exactly a man no more," he said. "But I'm what's left of an almighty good one, an' I can lick any duck-waddlin', web-footed, fish-eyed sailor that ever smelled salt water."

He sprang to his feet, grabbed the man's throat with his left hand, and, with a sudden surge, lifted him clear of the floor, jammed the back of his head against the side of one of the upper tier of bunks, and pinned him there with one hand, the while he casually smacked his purpling face with the palm of the other. Then he stepped back and let the man drop.

"Say 'sir,'" he ordered, bending over him.

"S-s-s-sir," the fellow gurgled out of his choked throat.

"Fine!" said Heenan. "Now don't get sassy with me again, or I'll pick your head off your shoulders an' throw it at ye."

But when one of the officers was near Heenan appeared, indeed, a broken man. He was extravagantly humble in speech and manner, and went about his unaccustomed tasks, bunglingly, to be sure, but with a fawning effort to please that was ludicrous. Imagine the actions of a lion emptied of its own nature by some miracle, and invested with all the instincts of a cringing mongrel dog, and you have a very good conception of Heenan's conduct—in the presence of any of the officers—after his first outbreak.

The two mates cursed him. Apprehensively at first, and then more and more freely as the meekness of his demeanor seemed only to increase with the passing days. Finally, for some trivial blunder, the first mate kicked him. Heenan cowered and muttered an apology for his mistake. From that time on he was cursed, kicked, and cuffed about

with cowardly venom and mercilessness, and he endured it all unresisting; disgustingly humble and apologetic.

His unexpected meekness was the subject of much discussion among the officers.

"I don't understand it," the captain protested, after Heenan's good behavior had endured for nearly three weeks. "I know the breed, I tell you. A stubborn class of men. And hard to handle. I expected trouble from him, and plenty of it. I'd have made short work of him that day he broke loose if I hadn't wanted to save him for the hunting and trapping next winter. He'll be a valuable man then. But I tell you I don't understand his actions. I know his breed, and it's not like 'em."

Larsen, the first mate, a hulking, light-haired Swede, laughed shortly. "Aw, he's broke," he declared. "His fighting nerve's gone. He's licked—broke—clear gone. He's one of those oversized bucko bullies that are never any good after they're once licked. The first time they get the worst of it they quit for life. He's got the strength of ten men in him; but he's broke. A ten-year-old boy could spit in his face and he'd apologize for being in the road."

The captain shrugged. "Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "It surely does look like it; but it ain't like 'em, I tell you. I know the breed, and it ain't like 'em."

They were nearing the Aleutian Islands when Heenan sought an interview with the captain, and told him the story of Barney West and his unjust imprisonment; told him of the dying man's confession that had been intrusted to him, and of his failure to deliver it.

"I didn't aim to mail it," he wound up. "But I reckon that's all there is to do now. I can mail it at Dutch Harbor. I reckon you'll be stoppin' there, anyhow; but I wanted to tell ye about this so's to make sure ye would."

"We're not putting in at Dutch Harbor," the captain answered. "We're not going up through Akutan at all. We're going through Unimak."

Heenan paled. "But, captain—sir,"

he said. "You'll stop there now, won't ye—sir? It ain't hardly any out o' the way—sir. Most all of 'em northbound goes through Akutan—sir. You'll stop there now, won't ye—sir?"

"Certainly not."

"But, captain, the man's in the pen, I'm tellin' ye—sir; and he's been there over eight years for a killin' he never did. An' him with a wife. She chased all over the country lookin' for this Kelcey pup, hoping to get the straight of it out o' him an' get her husban' free—sir. Think of a woman doin' that! I reckon she must think a right lot of him to go do that for him, don't you—sir? I reckon if she wants him that bad she ought to have him, hadn't she—sir? It ain't none out o' your way, captain—sir. Just—"

"The woman's no relative of mine," Wells interrupted. "Nor the man, either. We don't touch at Dutch Harbor."

"But—but Nome—sir? Nome?" Heenan questioned hoarsely. "I'll get a chance to mail it at—at Nome—sir? Or—you'll see that it's mailed—for me—sir?"

The captain was watching him narrowly. "We don't touch at Nome," he said shortly.

Heenan's lowered eyes were fixed on the hat brim that he was twisting between his thick fingers. "All right—sir; all right," he said submissively, after a moment. "No harm meant—sir. Just—just thought I'd tell ye about it, that's all—sir." He bowed clumsily and sidled out of the cabin.

The captain looked after him contemptuously. "Larsen was right," he said. "The man's broke; scared of his shadow in broad daylight. Queer yarn of his. I wonder if he was telling the truth?"

They sailed through Urimak Pass into the Bering Sea; past the Pribilof Islands; by St. Lawrence, and on up through the Bering Straits, past Cape Wales on the Seward Peninsula and into the Arctic Ocean. And big Bill Heenan remained meek, cringing, obedient. He watched his last hope for mailing the

letter fade with the fading shores of Seward Peninsula as the ship sailed into the Arctic, and made no complaint nor entreaty; voiced no regret. He seemed utterly, pitifully whipped.

It was along toward the middle of August that they ran in behind Demarcation Point—the northern tip of the international boundary line on the Arctic coast by the mouth of the Turner River—to get fresh water, and, if possible, fresh meat.

The captain called Heenan to him when they had anchored.

"You're a hunter," he said. "Tell me. Do you think there's a good chance for reindeer along here this time of year?"

Heenan studied the shore line. "Ain't that the mouth o' the Turner River over yon?" he asked. "An' this here's Demarcation Point, ain't it?"

"Yes."

Heenan's eyes kindled. "Say, I been up here. I bring a telegraph message up from Eagle for the captain of a ship 'twas in the ice by Herschel Island over Mackenzie River way one spring. I hung around with 'em down by Herschel till the ice went out, an' then they bring me back this far an' set me ashore here cause I wanted to get on back down to Circle. See that high stretch o' headland there? Well, right in back o' there's a piece o' meadowland—say, there's deer in there by the hundred this time o' year. I mind it well. There was a big bunch feedin' in there that time I'm tellin' ye about."

The captain beamed. "Good! You come along with me and Larsen, and we'll see what we can do for some venison."

The three went ashore, leaving Marshall to see to getting the water; climbed the two hundred feet of steep cliff that formed the headland, and disappeared behind its summit.

An hour later Heenan appeared on the top of the cliff and shouted down to Marshall, who was directing the filling of the barrels from a little stream that ran out from the rocks.

"Mr. Marshall—sir," he called. "Captain wants ye."

Marshall looked up. "What for?" he called back.

"I dunno—sir. He's back o' here apiece on the edge o' the meadow. He told me to bring ye—sir."

The second mate scrambled up the face of the cliff to where Heenan stood, and followed him back from the edge among the huge bowlders that were scattered thickly along the top. "How's the hunting?" he asked. "Did ye get anything?"

Heenan glanced back. Only the top of the vessel's masts were visible from where he stood. He whipped a short-barreled revolver out of his shirt and jammed the muzzle against Marshall's stomach.

"One little yelp pulls this trigger," he said. "So if ye feel like livin' keep still. The huntin's been great, thank ye. I got three skunks. Their hides ain't worth much to sell, but they're right valuable to me for the fun I'm goin' to get out o' tannin' 'em."

He stepped back and surveyed the startled man, twirling the short gun about his big forefinger, hooked in the trigger guard. His face distorted with a grin that chilled the mate's blood. Marshall recognized the gun as the captain's.

"An' you're the guy was goin' to bust my face while the captain held me under his gun," Heenan drawled. "Held me right under this same gun. How's it look to ye from the contrary end? Yeh! You're the guy that's been kickin' me an' knockin' me in the head every day for the last four months an' sleepin' easy on it. You been kickin' dynamite, an' it's just gone off. Shut up, you!" as Marshall started to speak. "Not one little yelp, or I'll spill this whole gun into your breakfast. Step right along in front o' me now—high an' purty—'cause if I don't like the style o' your gait, no tellin' what might come off."

A half mile back from the cliff on the edge of the lush, arctic meadow they came on the captain and the first mate lying on the ground, gagged and bound with quarter-inch manila. Heenan pointed to a fifteen-foot length of it lying on the ground. "I brung along a

key for you, too," he said to Marshall. "But I ain't goin' to lock ye up just yet. No. You an' me's goin' to play a little first. Yes, sir. We're goin' to have a lot o' fun."

He stepped back a few paces, laid the gun on the ground, and approached Marshall slowly. All his bantering manner was gone. His eyes were narrowed to mere pin points of icy blue. His lips snarled back from his teeth ugly, and he kept wetting them with his tongue. The accumulated anger of months was loose. Marshall backed away from him fearfully as he approached.

"Stand still, you!" Heenan roared at him. "You try to run from me an' I'll kill ye!" The words were almost sobbed. He was panting heavily, and his breath came and went in his throat with a reedy rasp.

"You!" he cried. "You that's been cussin' me out an' puttin' your hands on me with a gun to back your play. D'y'e know what I'm goin' to do to you? I'm goin' to beat you up."

And beat him up he did, with spirit, and without mercy.

"There, I reckon ye got somethin' to remember me by," he said.

Marshall was crying—crying shamelessly, lustily, like a hurt child. "Don't—don't hit me," he pleaded. "Don't hit me! Don't!"

"I ain't goin' to," said Heenan. "I reckon you been hit enough." He dragged him to one side and bound him with the remaining length of manila. Then he stepped over and took the gag from Larsen's mouth.

"You're next," he said.

Larsen fought with desperation. He knew the foul fighting tactics of a dozen lands, and tried them all; but the end of the fight found him helpless on his back. And, like Marshall, he cried as a child cries.

Heenan bound him again and loosed the captain. "I saved you out for the last," he said. "I wanted to be in a good workin' sweat when I got to you. You couldn't touch at Dutch Harbor, hey? You couldn't touch at Nome. You'd let a square guy rot in the pen

rather'n change the course o' your dirty old fish trap for half a day. You—”

The captain held up his hand. “Now just wait a—”

“Shut up! I’m talkin’ now. I’ve punished these other two guys just for what they done to me; but you got a double-jointed bunch o’ trouble comin’ to you. Now you put up your hands an’ come to it.”

Ten minutes later Heenan rose, satisfied, from the captain’s prostrate body, roped it, sat down on a rock, and lit his pipe.

Presently he rose, unbound the legs of the three beaten men—leaving their hands tied—and ordered them to their feet. He stood in front of them, grinning. “I’m the captain o’ this ship,” he announced. “Didn’t know this was a ship, did ye? Sure! I’m the captain. Captain Heenan o’ the good ship *Alaska*, bound for right where she is an’ always will be, thank God! An’ d’ye know who you are? I’ll tell ye—an’ don’t let me have to tell ye twice. Your name’s Dennis—first, second, and third. Ye may think you’re somebody else, but that’s a delusion it won’t be healthy for ye to have while you’re aboard my ship. One thing more. By the way, ye ain’t been able to take care o’ yourselves since ye come aboard o’ my ship. I judge ye ain’t right familiar with my ship’s discipline. It’s this: Do what you’re told, an’ get it done about ten minutes before I start tellin’ ye. That’s all. If ye lived up to that ye ought to be ten minutes’ walk out across that meadow, ‘cause I’m tellin’ ye now to start. Get goin’. Right out ahead o’ me, single file, an’ no monkey business, or I’ll drill ye.”

The way across the meadow that Heenan had pointed out was directly inland.

“Why, what—where—where are you going?” the captain stammered.

“Where am I going—what?”

The captain stared noncomprehendingly.

Heenan’s grin widened. “Say ‘sir,’ ” he prompted.

“Where are you going—s-s-sir?” the captain blurted out.

“Me?” said Heenan. “Why, I’m goin’ to Seattle.”

“But where—what—”

“An’ you’re green hands signed on to cruise a piece with me. Get goin’.”

“But— Man! Man! For God’s sake! What do you mean? You won’t—”

“I mean you’re goin’ with me. Right straight south for a hundred miles, an’ when ye get to the end of a hundred miles you’re goin’ to go another hundred just like it; an’ when ye get there you’re goin’ to take a long breath an’ go some more. Savvy?”

“But—the ship—”

Heenan shook his head. “I don’t own her; an’ none o’ my relatives got any interest in her. Start.”

“But the ship. I can’t— Anything you want, I’ll—”

Heenan leveled the gun at him. “We don’t stop at this port no longer. If you ain’t started before I count three I’m shootin’. That goes. Don’t think ‘cause I talk funny I’m foolin’. One—two—”

The captain of the *Minnie H.*, her first and second mate, alias Dennis, first, second, and third, moved off across the meadow in the general direction of the United States. When they had gone perhaps thirty yards, big Bill Heenan picked up the two Remingtons from where he had hidden them among the rocks, and followed; bound for fourteen-eighty-six Sixth Avenue, Seattle—with a letter for Mrs. Barney West.

Ten miles inland, along the banks of the Turner River, Heenan shot two reindeer, and directed the three Dennises in the butchering of them. After dinner—which the three prepared at his direction on heated rocks—he assigned to each a portion of the meat to be packed, and ordered them on. They had covered over forty miles before Heenan called a halt. He lolled on the ground, smoking, while his supper was cooked for him; ate, roped the three men securely, and started off with the guns.

“I’ll be back,” he assured them. “I’m just goin’ to mooch out an’ sleep some place where I won’t be right easy to find

in case any o' that ropin' don't hold. When I shanghai anybody, I aim to keep 'em shanghaied till I don't want 'em no more."

He did come back; an hour sooner than any of the leg-wearied, battered three would have walked of his own accord. He kicked them into action, and the strange procession moved on once more.

Their way for the first six days of their journey lay across a treeless country; a dreary succession of low, rock-strewn hills and small valleys studded with treacherous muskeg bogs. Then they came to a land of sparse, dwarf timber and higher hills. The country grew rougher and the timber larger as they progressed. On the tenth day of their journey south they cooked their dinner of bear meat, that Heenan had bagged the day before, in a little valley surrounded by high, well-timbered mountains. After Heenan had eaten he broke a long silence.

"I reckon," he said, "that me an' you three boobs is about square. Seein's I don't owe ye nothin' I'm goin' to say good-by."

"You're—you're going to leave us—here?" Marshall gasped. There was a great fear in his face.

"Oh, I'll leave ye a gun an' some ca'-tridges so ye can get out," Heenan assured him. "I ain't no killer. See that gap 'tween them two peaks about three mile off to the right there? I figure that's about the divide, an' I'm goin' up through there. I'll leave the gun an' ca'-tridges for ye right in the middle where ye see that lone cedar. I'll leave 'em right at the foot o' that tree. You stay here till ye see me up in that gap; then ye can come an' get the gun an' go wherever ye like."

"But—why, we couldn't find our way back to the ship even if they've waited for us," the captain protested.

"Probably not," Heenan agreed. "I didn't aim to leave ye where ye could."

"Well, then—— See here. You've done enough, man. Give us a chance. It's downright murder to leave us here alone. Give us a chance."

"You've got all the chance I have.

 **roA**

You're all two-legged, growed-up men—an' I'm leavin' ye the most o' that bear meat."

"But—man! Where are we?"

"Somewhere 'tween where we started from an' the arctic circle. That's all I know. Get over this range an' onto the Yukon watershed. Get some crick an' foller it up, an' you'll hit the Yukon. When ye get there, get some logs an' float till ye hit a camp. Can't miss it. Ye got plenty o' time before it gets chilly. If ye want to go south, foller me on through that gap, an' keep goin'. I been aimin' to hit the headwaters o' the Sheeniek over the divide. Dunno how close I am to it. Anyhow, ye got the same chance I have. Get out same as I'm goin' to. Now stay right where y're till ye see me in that gap—or I'll forget to leave the gun. Well, so long, boys. Hope ye have a nice walk."

And Heenan trudged off down the valley in the direction of the gap he had pointed out.

Five days later, Heenan, making his way down the course of the Sheeniek, came in sight of the selfsame cabin that he had left over six months before. The ludicrous irony of the situation struck him forcibly, and he stood on the bank of the river, looking up at the shack, and roared with laughter till the tears came.

His laughter ended in a choked gasp of astonishment, and he stared at the cabin, open-mouthed.

A woman had appeared in the doorway; a white woman in a shirt waist and blue skirt. She called to Heenan excitedly, and ran toward him at the top of her speed, calling out to him unintelligibly every few steps. There was a great terror in her voice; terror in her frenzied, stumbling run.

Heenan gripped his rifle, and, with his eyes on the door of the cabin, waited. The woman reached him, and dropped on her knees before him. She clutched him wildly; running her hands over his arms, his legs, his body, in frantic, clutching pats, like a blind person greeting a loved one long absent.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you! I'm so

glad!" she stammered out. "Oh, you're real, aren't you? Yes! Yes! You are! I thought maybe I'd gone crazy. I thought maybe— Oh, I'm so glad! I've been so scared! I've been so— Talk to me. Talk to me. Say something—anything. Say something. Please! Talk! Talk! Talk!"

"Why—yes, ma'am," said Heenan. "I'll talk. Sure! What—what'll I say?"

"Oh, oh! That's so good. So good. Thank God! Oh, thank God! That's so good."

"Well, what's—what is it, ma'am? Somebody been—"

"Oh, they left me! Alone! I've been—three—four—five days—I don't know. I lost track. I— Oh, I'm so glad to see you."

Suddenly the tension of her terror loosed in tears, and she clung to Heenan and cried out her fear. At length she drew away from him, laughed through her tears out of blue eyes that were washed clear of the insane terror that had been in them, and—arranged her hair! It was golden hair shot with threads of white, and it crowned the pretty, determined face of a middle-aged woman with a girlish manner.

"I'm—I'm awfully silly," she said. "But the Indians that brought me up here ran away and left me, and I've been

alone—I don't know how long. I—I was simply frantic. I—"

"Indians?" Heenan questioned.

"Yes. You see, when I reached Fort Yukon everybody that could go had left for a strike that was reported south of there somewhere, and I couldn't get any white man to bring me up here; so I got two Indian boys to—"

"Well, I'll be— 'Scuse me, ma'am. But ye hadn't ought to done that. Them Siwash is bad dope."

The woman touched the holster of a small revolver hung to her belt. "Oh, I wasn't afraid of them," she said firmly. "But when they ran away, I—" She caught her breath at the memory of it. "Oh, I was scared! I was nearly crazy. If you hadn't come when you did, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Heenan. Bill Heenan, ma'am."

"If you hadn't come when you did, Mr. Heenan, I don't know what I would have done. I am Mrs. West. I—"

"Mrs. West?"

"Yes. You see, I heard that there was a man living up here who— Why, what's the matter?"

"Barney West's wife? Barney West o' Seattle? The fur buyer?"

"Yes. Oh, do you know Barney? He—"

"Well, I'll be— 'Scuse me, ma'am. I got a letter for ye."



A CHANCE CALL

COLONEL JOHN HANNAN, who represents Senator LaFollette and the LaFollette ambitions in Washington, was sitting in his office one day when a pleasant-looking, middle-aged man dropped in for a chat. The conversation turned on progressive policies and the city of Washington.

"I'm somewhat of a progressive myself," said the visitor, "and I am interested to see how you fellows are getting along. I used to live in Washington with my father."

"What part of the city did you live in?" asked Hannan.

"Oh," said the caller, waving his hand in the general direction of the northwest part of the city, "over in that section. We had a very comfortable house, and I grew to be very fond of Washington."

"Is that so?" asked Hannan indifferently. "I'm glad to hear it."

The visitor left his card, and, after he had gone out, Hannan looked at it and read the name. The caller was Rutherford P. Hayes, a son of President Hayes, and the home which he had liked so much was the White House.

Mr. Jedson's Mistake

By Mayn Clew Garnett

Author of "The Lone Sperm Bull," "The Cyanide Lance," Etc.

A seaman's intuitions are almost uncanny. Jedson, chief mate of the liner, knew that a collision was at hand. It was pure intuition, but he was right. He was wrong, however, in a second intuition that apparently had more basis for belief than the first

CHAPTER I.

TWO bells struck off by the pilot-house clock. It was one in the morning, and the watch had been on deck an hour. The word was passed, and the big bell forward was struck twice.

"All's well, "sir—lights burning brightly," came the monotonous hail through the blackness.

Jedson stared straight ahead into the darkness, where a dim figure went to and fro, turning as it reached the rail and repeating the walk ten feet back to the side again from whence it came. It was that of Oleson, who was on lookout. Oleson was in Jedson's watch—a good and careful man. Jedson was chief mate, and he waited a moment, watching the figure. Then he answered softly, in a dull monotone: "All right," and went into the pilot house. He had been standing at the bridge rail, watching the blackness ahead.

The ship was the Chilean liner *Cochrane*, bound from Valparaiso to Buenos Aires, and she had just cleared the Cape of Virgins, at the southern end of Patagonia, and was steaming at full speed through the night toward her destination in the River Plata. She would connect with the English steamer *Lord Sufferin*, which left for Liverpool the day after her arrival in Buenos Aires. This was the schedule, and it had been in operation for a year and more.

Mr. Jedson took down the night glasses from the rack near the speaking

tubes which led below to the engine room. He tried to peer into the night ahead. It was very dark. The blackness was as of the inside of a closed space, of something unnatural, uncanny. It is seldom at sea that the experienced navigator cannot see several miles ahead in the night, if there is no fog or mist to shut off the view. But this night was clear. The stars shone clearly above in the dark-blue vault of the heavens. They gave the only light there was, and it seemed to be very little, less than usual. The air was cool—in fact, very cold, for it was July and midwinter in that southern zone. Ice formed where water struck in spray.

Jedson stepped out upon the bridge again and focused the glass upon what should have been the horizon, but only the faintest definition told of the meeting of sea and sky. He could not be sure of it.

On both sides of the giant ship the sea flowed hoarsely in huge rollers as she shore her way through it twenty knots an hour. The bow wave broke, spread out, and flowed off from her steel sides in liquid fire as it blended with the side wash, and left a ghostly path to mark her course. The phosphorus was very bright indeed.

An icy breath of air came from the mountains of Patagonia, now about fifty miles distant; but there was little wind, hardly enough to ruffle the surface of that dark ocean.

Mr. Jedson was nervous. He won-

dered at the peculiar blackness of the night, and rubbed the glass repeatedly as he tried to see ahead into the gloom. Oleson had hailed the bridge, and Jedson was glad to hear the news. It was the same old cry he had heard thousands of times before—the cry of the lookout reporting the conditions as the bells struck off the hour. Yet this night he seemed to be waiting for it, waiting for something to happen. He could not explain it. There was something uncanny in that darkness. He turned and gazed at the Magellan Clouds, which showed dim and nebulous. Then he focused upon the Southern Cross. The glass was all right; it was the lack of light that caused the lack of vision.

And then Jedson, chief mate, or chief officer, of the liner, began to walk athwartships with a nervous stride upon the bridge. He was well wrapped in furs, his uniform cap pulled well down over his eyes, and his hands were covered with heavy bear-skin gloves. He wore these only at night. No seaman wore bear-skin gloves in daylight.

This part of the South Atlantic was comparatively little traversed. Nothing but the Cape Horn fleet, or some cruising whaleman, ever came here. His was the only line of steamers that went through the Straits of Magellan. Any steamer he might meet would almost to a certainty be a warship bound to the Pacific. This class of vessel he had no cause to fear. A warship has bright lights, and can be seen as far as a passenger liner.

And yet as the hours dragged and he walked across that bridge, he was aware of a peculiar sensation, a sensation of dread, actual fear. He was not a nervous man. He was a seaman of the first quality, and the thing worried him. Three bells struck off, then four, and Oleson left the lookout after reporting as before. A man came on lookout named Wienberg. Jedson hardly knew him, and this fact added to his alarm. He would not trust to the man's eyes or his intelligence.

At five bells—or half after two in the morning—it seemed to grow brighter. Jedson still walked to and fro with

nervous stride and waited for the three more strokes, or eight bells, that would relieve him from his vigil.

Mr. Conrad, the second officer of the liner, would take the bridge and con the ship. Conrad was a Swede, and a man of excellent record, a fine seaman, and a good navigator. He had once commanded a large tramp steamer, but left her for the more onerous berth but brighter surroundings of the liner. The *Cochrane* was English built, and her officers had originally all been subjects of Great Britain; but since her sale into the Chilean Line, her owners had waived the usual methods and had taken what officers they could get who had good records, or records that appeared good. Jedson was ticketed by the board of trade, and every consul who signed him off had always seen the stamp "very good," or "excellent," done in red ink within the circles for ability and character.

As three o'clock drew near, Jedson ceased his rapid strides. He now stood gazing right ahead into the darkness. A form came near him, and he turned with a start. Captain Phillips, the master, had come on deck to take a look around, and had approached the mate without warning. Jedson knew that his involuntary start had been observed by Phillips. The captain had awakened at the sudden stillness, the sudden stopping of the footsteps upon the bridge. This sometimes meant that the officer there had become drowsy and had either sat down for a few moments or had become unresponsive to the occasion. Captain Phillips had never caught either of his officers asleep or reclining during the mid or morning watch. Yet in spite of this he was always alert, always watching, as a good master should.

"Very dark, sir," commented Jedson, turning again and staring ahead.

"Yes, rather dark for a clear night. How are you running now?" asked the captain.

"North, twenty-two east by binnacle," said Jedson, which meant, under the old sailings, that the ship was heading about nor' northeast.

"That makes north twenty-three east by standard," said the master, with finality. "Nothing to the westward—mind you."

"Yes, sir; aye, aye, sir," assented Jedson.

Phillips went into his room again. It was cold on the bridge, and he was sure his chief officer would not be unwary after that sudden appearance. He had seen the start, noticed the peculiar agitation the officer had shown, and he pondered upon it. Jedson had done nothing. He was sure of it. He was standing there staring right ahead into the night when the master had come upon him. It worried the captain a moment, and then, thinking that he had probably disturbed some secret thoughts of the man, he smiled to himself and snuggled down into his berth and fell asleep.

Jedson was more upset than ever. That start he had given was that of a guilty man. It made him angry to be approached in the manner the captain had done. He resented it. Why had the captain come upon him like that? Was he a sneak, a peeper, to come lurking furtively upon the bridge and pilot house at all hours to spy upon his men?

The blood surged thickly in Jedson's face. The more he thought of it, the more he resented it. He grew very angry.

"And yet I did start—at what? I'll be hanged if I know!" he muttered.

He walked again, and the nervousness increased instead of vanishing.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he finally said. "I'm as nervous as a cat. There's something wrong, something making me a fool. I'm too timid to be a sailor—I'm an old woman. And then that sneaking old man coming upon me like that!"

He turned to the man at the wheel. "How's she heading now?"

"North twenty-two east, sir," said the man, in a singsong voice.

"Nothing to the westward," snapped Jedson.

"Nothing to the westward, sir," came the response.

Seven bells struck. A long half hour, and then the watch was over. It was no lighter, and the sea was still smooth and black, dark as ink with the flares of phosphorescent fire whenever it was disturbed.

"It is full of life, full of things," said Jedson to himself. "That's what it is that gets me. It's full of things we don't know about. There's a feeling that we're running over something, that there's something in the ocean we are running toward— Bah, it's foolishness!"

He strode briskly from port to starboard and back again. Then he hung over the rail and gazed down into the sea alongside, where it roared and snored away into the gloom. His eyes were upon the outline of the ship, following her long length a couple of hundred feet from where he stood. Then he gazed right ahead of her forefoot where it cut the inky sea.

As he did so, he thought he saw something dark in the water. It vanished. He gave a short gasp. His heart beat a little faster. Then he looked again. Something blacker than the surrounding water was lying straight in her course; there was no mistake, no dreaming. Jedson looked at it, fascinated. He did not believe his eyes. The thing was very close aboard. It was right under her bows, right under her tearing forefoot as it split the seas.

Then came the crash.

It was not very loud, not very severe. The two hundred passengers below did not even feel the shock enough to awaken, although some of them testified afterward that they were thrown out of their bunks by the sudden setting up of the ship. The great liner shivered, trembled a little—then went on as before, and Jedson was still staring there into the blackness. He had not even yelled to ring off the engines.

For a short moment he felt the dread of the collision. Then he awoke and called to the helmsman to stop her, and, as he did so, he dashed at the telegraph and threw it at full speed astern.

CHAPTER II.

When Captain Phillips came on deck, which he did within five seconds after the shock, he found Jedson on the bridge with his hand on the telegraph.

"What is it—what happened?" he asked quickly, in a low tone.

"I don't know, sir—we hit something—can't see anything," answered the officer nervously.

The captain rushed to the port side and looked over; then darted to the starboard rail. He saw nothing. There was nothing alongside to show that the liner had struck anything solid.

"Stop her! Stop the engines," he said to Jedson.

The mate threw the indicator to "Stop," and held it there. The vibrations of the engines ceased. The liner, her headway stopped by the reversing screws, now lay dead in the calm, black sea, and rolled gently to and fro in the swell. Sounds of feet scuffling about the decks told of aroused men. The captain ran aft. He looked over the side again and again, and saw nothing. Then he rushed back to the bridge and met the second officer, Mr. Conrad, coming up the bridge steps. Conrad had a scared look upon his face—a look of something he dreaded to ask.

They both came to where Jedson stood with his hands on the telegraph.

"Well, by Heaven, we hit something—didn't we?" asked the captain.

"I'm sure of it," answered Jedson. "Yet there is nothing showing alongside, nothing anywhere but this black ocean—infernally dark, sir—"

The captain went to the engine-room tubes. He called for the chief. There was no water coming below in the engine room. He ordered the pumps started, anyhow, and sent a crew forward, under Conrad, to examine the fore peak.

Mr. Conrad called away his men, and started down below. He had not gone far before the surging sea coming through a great gap in the bows forced him and his men on deck again. The

forward bulkhead was closed against the flood.

The ship had bulkheads, as most steel vessels have, but she lacked the automatic device for closing them, and the doors were forced in by hand. This allowed a quantity of sea water below, but not enough to either endanger her cargo or her hull. Her electric lights had gone out with the shock, and the sudden darkness had caused uneasiness where it was noticed. The shaft of the dynamo had broken. The bos'n quickly had the oil lights lighted, and still the ship lay there waiting.

Oleson ran forward. "There's something floating astern, sir," he announced.

"What is it?" asked the captain.

"Don't know, sir, but it's long and black—might be the hull of a ship, sir, but it's too dark to see."

"Mr. Jedson, lower down your boat, and go and see what we hit," ordered the captain. "Hurry up and bear a hand—we may have hit something—something knocked a hole in us."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Jedson; and he rushed on deck, blowing his whistle for his men. He met the head steward. "Tell every one who's awake we've stopped to pick up a boat," he told that officer. "Quiet them, and don't let them know we ran into anything."

The steward went aft, and passed the word among his men. The cabins remained quiet. There was no excitement.

Jedson got his crew instantly. They responded to their drill, and boat No. 1 was in the water within a few minutes. He slid down the falls and took his place aft.

"Out oars—give way, port; ease, starboard!" he ordered; and the craft swung out with precision. He was soon on his way astern to where the object was last seen by Oleson.

The boat went quickly off into the darkness. Jedson turned and watched the shadowy form of the *Cochrane* looming large and indistinct. She grew smaller rapidly, and he turned suddenly to search the sea for traces of the thing she had struck. As he did so, the small

boat's head ran upon a submerged object, and the sudden jar brought the officer headlong to the thwarts.

"What's the matter?" he grunted, getting up.

"We've hit it, sir," said his bow oarsman; "we're fast upon it."

The man stood up and prodded down into the sea with his oar. A long swell, rolling, broke upon something fifty feet distant, and roared in a white, fiery surge upon them. The boat was lifted clear, and smashed down hard again. Then, as Jedson stared about him, an enormous shadow arose from the sea. It came slowly up, raised above the surface, showing what looked to be the long rail of a ship. A line of white told its shape. Short, stumpy shadows like the lower masts of the vessel stood upright for a few moments, and Jedson gazed at them. Then he was aware that another movement beneath the surface was between himself and his ship, and the other rail arose clear. The small boat was on the swamped deck of the derelict, and surrounded by her rail, which broke the sea on all sides.

"We're caught!" cried the stroke oarsman.

"Quick—give way, starboard—steady—back water—"

The boat was inclosed within the main-deck space of the sunken vessel, and Jedson was amazed. He was caught as in a trap. It looked for a few minutes as though he would lose his boat. She floated in two feet of water, and struck what appeared to be the coamings of the main hatch. Then, while they searched for a passage through the surrounding bulwarks, there was a sigh, a giant breath. All hands stopped, listening. Another tremendous sighing, and the swell drowned it in a roar as it broke over the rail. Then, the air within escaping, the wreck settled slowly down, and the rail vanished from about them. A heavier swell than usual rolled the derelict over a little farther, and Jedson saw the gap where his ship had struck. It had cut halfway through the wreck, and that part now rolled clear of the sea.

Broken timbers, planks, and beams showed ragged in the shadows. Jedson swung his boat about to clear them, and she ran hard upon the edge of the hatchway, where she hung.

"This won't do! We must get clear of this thing!" shouted the mate nervously.

Two men stood up and shoved with their oars to try and push the boat off. The air which had held the wreck up blew out now and again from below, making the sighing sound that was so ghostly and weird. The boat finally floated clear, and went astern to the break of the poop, where she struck the door leading below. The door burst open with the impact, and, although the cabin inside was flooded, the sea rushed in and then out again.

Something thudded softly against the side of the boat. Jedson, trying to get clear of the wreck, looked over, saw something floating in the dark water, and grabbed it. He took hold of a dead man's hand.

At first he shivered, and let go with an oath. The shock scared him. Then he overcame his feelings, and pulled the corpse up alongside, where his men helped him to drag it aboard the small boat.

With that, the wreck rolled again slowly in the swell. The rushing of the sea upon the starboard rail told of its rising again, but it did not come high. The derelict was settling.

The gap where the liner had torn through now showed plain to the officer. He ordered the men to give way with a will, and headed the boat for it. Bumping over the hidden things under them on the deck, the boat managed to keep her way upon her, and suddenly went through and clear into the sea.

Jedson's heart was beating fast. He said nothing. Then he gave orders to give way, and he headed back to the *Cochrane*. The wreck sank out of sight.

"Sunken vessel, sir," he reported, as he came near.

"I thought so," came the response from Phillips. "H'ist in the boat."

In a few minutes the liner was un-

der way again, and heading her course with her forward compartment under water, swamped. She stopped again after a few minutes to get a covering over the hole, as the pressure was too great upon the bulkhead, and made it dangerous. Then she proceeded on her way to Buenos Aires.

CHAPTER III.

The morning dawned, and the sun shone brightly. It was cold but clear. The passengers came on deck and discussed the situation. They were running under half speed, for Captain Phillips was afraid to press his ship too much in her crippled condition. She had run into the submerged wreck of some sailing ship which had been abandoned and which still floated.

Miss Jardine came on deck with her mother, and sat near the bridge steps. A steward fixed her comfortable with rugs, and she sat listening to the discussion as to what would happen or might happen to the liner. She had not felt the shock of the collision, and none of the passengers knew how badly the vessel had been hit. No one was allowed forward. The slight settling by the head was unexplained.

Jedson came on deck after eight bells, when his watch turned out. The sun was shining, and the sea was grand to look upon. The blackness and the peculiar accident of the night had left him a little pale, but, on the whole, he had slept the most of the four hours he had below. He noticed Miss Jardine, and as soon as possible he went to her.

"Good morning," he said, as he came up. "He had met her several times since the ship had left Valparaiso, and she had sat next to him at the table, with her mother opposite.

"Well," she said, "what was the matter last night? I heard that we struck something—tell me."

"We struck an old hulk—a derelict," said Jedson. "She was floating just awash, and we cut her down. I went to her and got caught on her deck as she rolled over—spent a lot of time try-

ing to get away. Then the air wheezed out of her, and down she went—that was all."

"No one in her, of course?" asked the girl.

Jedson thought of that dead man, of that ghostly hand that floated up to him. They hadn't even buried the body yet. The ghastly night was not pleasant to remember.

"No," he said, with hesitation, "there was no one in her, of course. She'd probably been wrecked weeks ago, and was just floating about, getting in the way of ships."

"Did it hurt us—our ship?" asked the girl.

"Not much—just a little. We are running slower than usual, but there's plenty of time. It's only three days' run at the most. How did you sleep?"

"Splendidly!" said Miss Jardine. "When you get time, take me forward and let me see where she hit us—the wreck—I want to see how it struck."

"All right," said the mate; "just as soon as I take the business of the morning over."

"You know, I'm awfully interested in these things," went on Miss Jardine, "because my father came around here lately, as you know, in the *Albatross*. He would have taken us with him but for that horrid cargo of nitrates—no one can live aboard a ship with those nitrates, he said. We will meet him in Liverpool next month if we get in on time to connect with the English steamer out from Buenos Aires."

"Yes, I know," said Jedson; "but we'll be in on time—only a day late, at the most."

Captain Phillips came on the bridge. He was worried. The hole in his ship's bow was not a slight thing to consider. If there was any heavy weather there might be serious trouble. The pressure upon the bulkhead was tremendous, and he could not push her into a seaway. She might start something and go down like a stone. He asked Jedson if there was anything more done about the dead man he had brought aboard.

"I gave orders to have him sewed in canvas, sir, and then dropped over-

board. I thought it was best not to let the passengers know about it," said the mate.

"But that won't do," said the captain. "We'll have to have a proper burial. If there is anything else, there might be trouble when we come in."

Jedson was allowed to go down and see to it. On his way, he met Miss Jardine, who insisted upon accompanying him below. His time was short, and, rather than be rude, he was forced to assent, hoping that the ghastly find would be hidden from her sight before they arrived upon the lower deck. He met Smith, the bos'n, and that officer took them to where the corpse had been laid out, covered with a tarpaulin. Smith had not sewn the body up, and Jedson tried to get the girl away.

"But I wish to look at it—I must see it!" said Miss Jardine. "It seems so strange, so frightful, to pick up a dead man from a sunken wreck in a b'ack night, far from shore. Yes, let me look at the poor fellow."

She was quite agitated. It was as if something pressed upon her, gave her an interest more than ordinary. Jedson, without further ado, ordered Smith to pull back the cloth, and the head of the dead man was revealed.

Instantly there was a sharp cry from Miss Jardine. She staggered forward. Jedson quickly caught her and steadied her.

"Don't, don't!" he said. "Come away from here; it's ghastly——"

"It's father! Oh, my God, it's father!" cried the girl.

Right in the middle of the forehead of the man was a small hole. He had been shot straight between the eyes. His beard was damp, but showed black and streaked with gray; the eyes, set far apart, were like those of the girl, but they were staring at something, staring with a frightful stare.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me! How could you?" wailed the girl. "You must have known it was father!" She broke down, sobbing, and Jedson led her away.

He was amazed, dumfounded. Here

he had struck a derelict in the night, picked up a dead man, and found him the father of a girl he liked very much indeed. The sea is strange. It has many secrets, but this was extraordinary. He led the girl to the upper deck and thence to her room, where her mother was told the news. Then he went back upon the bridge, where he met Phillips, who was as astonished as himself at the story.

The ship *Albatross* had sailed from Valparaiso a month before, loaded with nitrates for England. Captain Jardine had refused to take his wife and daughter with him on account of the disagreeable character of the cargo, and had engaged passage for them upon the Chilean liner to Buenos Aires, and from thence on home by steamer. He had intended to meet them in Liverpool. The ship had met with some kind of disaster. Part of her cargo had been lumber, and that was what had probably kept her afloat after some accident. The stroke of the *Cochrane's* prow had cut a deep gash in her and had allowed the confined air to escape. She had then sunk, but before going down had let that ghastly corpse come from her cabin to tell its tale of mystery and death. That the man had been killed was certain. The bullet hole told the tale beyond question. It was as if fate had held the derelict afloat long enough to allow that liner to strike it and send the dead evidence of a crime to those who would be waiting, waiting to hear. It was most uncanny, and Phillips, Jedson, and Conrad were all duly impressed with the strangeness of the affair. They spoke of it in whispers. They hardly dared to look at the girl or her mother.

The body of Captain Jardine, of the ship *Albatross*, was buried that afternoon at sea, with the bright sun shining upon the wave tops, and the cold wind from the mountains of Patagonia making the air clear and brisk. The passengers gathered in the saloon, where the services were read by Captain Phillips. Then the *Cochrane* was started away on her course, with two heartbroken women and a very strange-

ly affected crowd of passengers aboard her.

Jedson was much worried. He liked the girl. He had been at the table with her now for more than a week. Her banishment to her room preyed upon him. He wanted to do something, to try to alleviate the sorrow that he knew she and her mother must feel. He studied the case. He knew the desperate gangs of seamen who shipped in the nitrate ships. It was probably in one of the many fracases that happen aboard them that the master had been murdered. Then what had become of the crew? Where had they gone? Had the boats all been lost, or had the men gone in them? The ship had probably been wrecked for more than three weeks. There was not a single thing to work from, to base anything upon save that ghastly find that had almost thrust its hand in his in the blackness of the night. The captain had been murdered. That was all he knew.

CHAPTER IV.

During the following day the ship staggered along in the smooth sea under the land, the high mountains showing plainly in the clear air.

She gradually worked her way northward, and made little water, not enough to endanger her. There was no port this side of Buenos Aires where she might get help, or Captain Phillips would have headed for it. He would have to stand on until he reached the River Plata, and he fervently hoped that he would not meet with any weather before he arrived there.

On the third day the ship had made over a thousand miles northing. She was going fairly well through a smooth sea under the land when the wind died away and the heat began to be felt more. She was in the thirties, and the weather was growing rapidly warmer.

Jedson was on the bridge that afternoon, and noticed the banks of vapor rising to the westward, and the nearness of the river foretold the danger of the pampero, the heavy wind that rushes forth from the River Plata and

comes with heavy squalls of rain and lightning. The sun shone brilliantly, but the rising banks upon the western horizon told of the change that was coming. He called Captain Phillips, and the ship was headed in closer under the land.

In the sunlight there came the distant boom of thunder, a long, reverberating report, rising and falling, until finally dying away altogether. There was not a cloud near them, not a single bit of anything like a squall, save the top of the bank just showing, far away over the land. It had an uncanny effect among the passengers. Many looked for a squall, but as none came they chatted under the awning and waited until another report came sounding over the sea.

For several hours this kept up without anything occurring to cause alarm. Jedson left the bridge, Conrad stood his watch, and Jedson came on again, having passed four uncomfortable hours below, watching the glass falling and every indication of heavy weather showing plainly.

In the first watch that night, Jedson came on the bridge anxious and perturbed. The carpenter had reported that the water was gaining upon the leak in the doors in the forward bulkhead. The ship was slowed down to half speed, and she rolled slowly along through a smooth sea toward the River Plata. If she could make the river the next day, she would be able to run in closer and keep her speed until she finally reached the jetties. Captain Phillips took a little sleep during those hours after supper, hoping that he could get needed rest, for he was sure he would be busy before the morning.

Jedson walked to and fro, as usual, and conned his disabled ship. His thoughts were with the poor girl below with her mother. He had studied her case, and could do nothing for her—her father was dead. There remained only the task of catching the murderers, and the chances for such a thing at sea he knew were slight indeed. Probably the crew had all been either killed or lost in the storm that

had wrecked the *Albatross*. She had been dismasted. That was certain. It must have been something of a blow to force the three masts out of a powerful vessel like that, full-rigged and fully manned.

In the darkness of the evening, he strode back and forth with an eye upon the western horizon. Fitful flashes of lightning told of something there beyond the hills. He watched until seven bells, and then called the captain again, for his order had run out, and he must wait until the course was changed.

Phillips saw that there was trouble coming with that falling glass. He felt that it would be a pampero, for he was nearing the river, and the season was right for it. He brought his ship as close as he dared to the shore, where he hoped to head the sea, and let it go at that. It was all he could do.

At a few minutes to eight the night was very dark. Lightning flashed and the thunder rolled loudly. A slight breeze came from the northward, fanning Jedson's face. It was quite warm.

Captain Phillips came on deck to take charge, and he had no sooner done so than a black mass of vapor showed now and then in the flashes of lightning. The mass came rapidly from the westward. Upon the three masts of the *Cochrane St. Elmo*'s fire flamed steadily, making a ghastly glare. They flamed from the gaff ends, the trucks, and upon the foreyard, the foremast being square-rigged. Jedson called the second mate, and he came on deck; but Jedson remained upon the bridge, waiting for something he knew not what.

At ten minutes past eight there was a tremendous report, a blinding flash, and the ship staggered under the stroke of a bolt of lightning. It did no damage, save to temporarily blind all on deck. A sharp puff followed quickly. The edge of the approaching bank showed itself in the flares, and it was coming fast. A distant murmur arose, and Jedson stopped and listened, the echo of the terrific report still ringing in his ears. Then a sharp squall struck the ship. She heeled slightly, as it was upon her port side. The next instant

she was taking the weight of a pampero upon her port beam, and was heeled over to a sharp angle, with the wind roaring, rushing with hurricane force from the westward.

They had struck it, the fiercest wind in the South Atlantic. A pampero from the River Plata.

The wind came in terrific squalls, and hove the steamer upon her starboard side. She took the weight of it fairly upon her beam, and sagged off to leeward, with her engines driving her ahead slowly. Then the sea began to make. Jedson watched her as she strove to force her way ahead. He could not talk to the captain, who stood at his side, for the roar of the wind and the rush of flying spray and rain made it necessary to yell to be heard a few feet distant.

Clinging to the rail of the bridge, they both held on and tried to get the ship headed closer to the wind and toward the beach. She refused to answer her helm under the slow speed, and sagged off sideways, in spite of all they could do. The sea began to break savagely over her. It came over her low bows where she hung low from her wound. Then it burst wildly over her amidships and flooded the gangways. Still they were close enough to land not to get the weight of a high-rolling sea, and they kept along waiting for it to ease, so that they might head her in even closer.

Phillips made his way into the pilot house, and watched the compass. It held steady, and showed the vessel making a northerly course. At every squall when it let up between the puffs, he had the wheel hard over, and the ship swung all she would go to the westward. Then, with the following squall, she would sag off again.

Two hours of this passed with no change. The squalls, if anything, grew more furious and came closer together. The sea was running strong, and swept the forward deck badly, taking everything that was movable along with it. Jedson watched the white, roaring waste below him, and tried to see what

was happening there. It was too dark to make out anything, but now and then a crash told of something carrying away in the burst of sea water that roared white and ghastly over the port rail. The passengers were ordered below and locked in.

"It won't do to get off too far in this," bawled Phillips, as he came close to the mate. "We've got to keep close in—if we get driven off, we've got to head a tremendous sea—we can't. Try and rig a sea anchor—a drag—get something over forward, so we can bring her around—understand—we must bring her around—head her for the beach and get close in before the sea is too heavy for us."

Jedson knew what was wanted—knew how to do it, also. Conrad was left on the bridge with Phillips, and the mate went aft and down onto the main deck, where he called for the carpenter and bos'n to get their men and help.

In the alleyways the men were waiting, watching, and speculating upon what would be done. They knew the ship was in danger, and must get her head around before the sea became too heavy for her to lay broadside to it. It was all right as long as she lay under the lee of the high land, but she was going fast seaward, and she would soon be off the mouth of the river, where a giant sea swept down from far to the westward, clear out halfway across the ocean.

Jedson managed to get two cargo booms lashed together with a piece of heavy chain. To these he let the bight of the chain hang down, and on this bight he shackled a small kedge anchor. He then made a bridle from the bight of the chain and the ends of the spars, or booms, the three ends meeting and fastening to the end of his cable to ride with. Lashed across the chain with fifteen-strand stuff were two thicknesses of a piece of No. 00 canvas, the hatch cover from the after hatchway. He led the stuff forward, and, by dint of tremendous endeavor, they finally got the booms over the lee side and led the drag forward, while the engines

stopped and the ship's headway came to an end.

The ship's high stern, owing to her settling forward, enabled the drag to swing her head to the sea within a few minutes, and she was soon heading it with her engines stopped entirely. Her pumps kept going, and they just equaled the water she was making, keeping it below the grates and below the danger line.

All night she lay like this, making good weather of it, but going fast to the eastward in spite of the drag, which stretched the hawser taut and kept the bows well up to the wind. The morning dawned upon a gray sea, torn and ragged, with white combers rolling swiftly. It grew as the day came, and showed the officers of the ship that they were almost abreast of the river and out of sight of land.

CHAPTER V.

Jedson had been on deck all that night. It was growing light when he asked for his coffee, and the steward brought it to him in the shelter of the pilot house. Captain Phillips had also been up all the time, watching his ship and doing what he could to ease her in the hurricane. She swallowed deep, and swamped her forward deck in the seas, but she was still tight enough, and making good enough weather of it to insure safety.

The seas, gray-white on their tops, rolled in huge masses of water, and Jedson watched them with an anxious eye that was bloodshot from the strain of trying to pierce the blackness of the night. A great albatross circled near and seemed to mind the wind not at all. The mate scanned the horizon continually for some signs of a let-up, or smoke of a steamer. He did not expect to call for aid—at least, not yet—but it would be more comfortable to have a ship near at hand, with all those passengers aboard of the *Cochrane*.

Taking his glasses, for the twentieth time that morning, he swept the seas with his gaze, and suddenly he stopped, focused upon a small object that had

appeared for an instant, like a ghost, and then vanished. It was to the southward, and he held the glass as near the spot where he had seen it as he could. Again a black speck showed upon the sea, vanished, then showed again. It was a small boat, but there were no oars out, no one rowing, no sail, or anything. She was just lying head to the sea and riding it sometimes in view and sometimes out of sight behind the hills of water which rolled heavily and majestically to the eastward. It was still blowing a gale, and the seas were even greater than during the night as the ship was now far offshore and felt the whole sweep of the pampero, taking the long stretch from the river with it.

"Boat on port side, sir—far off to the southward," said the mate, coming to the window of the pilot house, where Phillips gazed out. The captain made his way on deck. Together they watched the craft as it rode the seas.

"What do you make of her?" asked the captain.

"Ship's boat, sure, sir," said Jedson.

"Yes, sir, that's what she is," said Conrad, with finality.

They waited, and the small object drifted out of sight. They took its course and bearings, and kept them, intending to take the matter up if the sea went down.

Within a few hours the sea was less dangerous. The drag was cut adrift and the liner made ready to drive in to Buenos Aires under steam. She started slowly, just making headway, her sunken bows burying dangerously. It was late in the afternoon, and Jedson had the sun in his face, and gazed astern often. It showed him a black speck again, and he called the captain's attention to it.

There was no doubt about it, the object was the small boat they had seen in the morning, and she was making way against the wind and sea. This showed that there were men in her, and Phillips decided that the only human thing he could do was to heave his vessel to again and get them. The sea was now rolling in long, heaving swells that did not endanger the ship

as long as she was not forced into them. He could lie to with safety for half an hour and send a boat out to get those adrift.

Jedson was called away again, and he lowered down his boat and started off, going straight astern, where the speck showed, a mile distant. The liner was stopped, and let drift, sagging off slowly but safely.

Jedson came up to the boat within a few minutes, his men rowing fast. In the stern of the strange craft sat a man holding an oar with one hand and steering close on the wind, the bit of sail she carried sending her along swiftly across the liner's wake, but to windward also. Jedson hailed, and the man threw the boat's head into the wind. She stopped, and Jedson came alongside.

"From a ship?" asked the officer quickly.

The man nodded, and whispered something in assent. He pointed to his mouth. "It was black, and the lips were cracked. He had been without water for four days. In the boat's bottom lay the forms of six more men.

The man in the stern tried to rise, but fell back upon the seat. Jedson sprang aboard, and helped him into his own boat. The rest were carefully transferred, and the officer started back to his ship.

The man who had steered the boat was the only one alive.

All that night the liner plunged steadily on her course toward safety. She rooted and dove her sunken bows under, but the bulkhead held. The next day she was in sight of land, and was headed for the Cape San Antonio. Under the land, her headway was increased, and she soon came standing up the river, with all hands rejoicing at their deliverance. They had been very near the port of missing ships, and they were thankful to be back again.

Jedson walked the bridge and studied the case as he saw it. Miss Jardine still kept her room. There was no doubt in the officer's mind as to who the man he picked up would turn out to be as soon as he could speak and give an

account of himself. There was no hurry to question him. They would let him recover first from that awful horror of four weeks in a lost boat. Then he could tell his story. He could not escape. Conrad said nothing, and Captain Phillips only ventured the guess that the boat was one from the lost ship, the *Albatross*.

Into the harbor of Buenos Aires the liner limped the next day, and the mate got ready to take a sleep—a rest that was necessary, for he had stood his watch like a man for three days and nights without let-up.

Before turning in, he went to the room of the man he had saved. The fellow was sitting up, attended by the steward. He was a tall, slender man, not over thirty, and he had been very good-looking. His eyes were now less bloodshot, and his face had more the natural color of a healthy human being. He smiled, and held out his hand to Jedson.

The mate put his hand behind himself with some show of feeling. The man, looking him straight in the eyes, said nothing. The smile died from his face.

"How do you feel?" asked the officer.

"Well enough," was the quiet response.

"You belong to the *Albatross*—the ship *Albatross*, that was lost near the Straits of Magellan," said Jedson calmly.

"Yes, I'm her chief mate—I was in charge of the boat. Williams had the other boat. The captain remained aboard—"

"Naturally. He couldn't help it," said Jedson softly.

"What do you mean?" asked the man.

"He was shot through the head—right between the eyes—he couldn't very well get away after that, could he?" said Jedson.

"How do you know that?" asked the man.

"Never mind," said Jedson. "Many know it besides myself. Now, tell me how it happened."

"My name is John Hooper, chief mate of that ship," said the fellow, "and

what I tell you you may believe or not—just as you please. I noticed you wouldn't shake hands and know what you mean, all right, by it—"

"Shut the door, steward," said Jedson, interrupting.

The steward shut the door of the stateroom.

"Now go ahead," said the mate.

"We left Valparaiso nearly three months ago," went on Hooper. "Captain Jardine had a nasty cargo of nitrates, and he refused, on that account, to take his wife and daughter with him. I happen to know the family very well, and advised them to go by way of your line to Buenos Aires, and so on by steamer to England. We made the horn in due time, and had a nasty bit of weather getting around, but we came past Cape St. John all right and squared away for the run up the coast, carrying everything she could stand. We were something like abreast of the Magellan the second night, and it was Williams' watch. He ran the ship head on into an iceberg.

"The foremast went over the side, leaving the main and mizzen standing. The bowsprit was snapped short off, and the forward part of the ship stove in so that she filled within half an hour after hitting. We had a million feet of timber in her along with the nitrates. This made her sink slowly, and she was water-logged, going down to her hatch coamings and then stopping. She was flooded fore and aft, and no man could live in her. It was blowing hard, and we had plenty of trouble getting the boats out. Captain Jardine refused to go, refused to leave the ship. He hoped to keep her afloat. He even refused to allow the men to go in the boats. We demanded that he allow us to save ourselves. He still refused, and came to the edge of the poop, which was still above the sea, with a drawn revolver. We waited and stayed for a time, but the mainmast went soon after that, and then the mizzen followed.

"We saw there was no use in staying, and asked to leave again. I had a revolver, and so did Williams. The

second mate threw his pistol overboard and went into his boat without further ado. Captain Jardine swore he would shoot the first man who left after that. I did not shoot him. We all left in a bunch, and the last we saw of him was when he started to go below. He would not leave the ship while she floated. The cabin was flooded, and he could not have lived there long——”

“In other words, he shot himself,” said the mate quietly.

“He did, if he was shot at all. I did not shoot him,” said Hooper.

“The rest say you shot him,” said Jedson softly.

“What rest—my men?” asked the man.

“Sure,” said the mate.

“You lie!” said Hooper calmly. That was all. Jedson had played his hand, and he had failed to break the fellow. He was puzzled, but hoped to make him confess yet.

Jedson thought a little. Then he went to the door of Miss Jardine’s room and knocked.

“I want to speak to you a few moments,” he said.

The girl came out and looked at him.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Do you know the mate of the *Albatross*?” asked Jedson.

“Yes,” she said.

“Did he have any quarrel with your father?”

“Yes, a little misunderstanding—perhaps—papa did not like him.”

“Would you mind confronting him? He is here,” said Jedson.

The girl gave a cry, turned pale, staggered a little, and caught the side of the cabin.

“Take me to him,” she whispered.

Jedson led the way to the castaway’s room. The steward was still there. He knocked at the door. It was opened. The man in the bunk started up, looked at the figure of the girl for an instant. Then he sprang out of bed, and held out his arms. Miss Jardine flung herself into them with a glad cry:

“Jack!”

It was but the one word. It was as if her whole soul went into that word, and the man held her tightly to his breast.

“Alice, oh, Alice!” he said, again and again. Then he kissed her.

“I guess we are not wanted here any longer,” whispered the steward to the chief mate.

Jedson stood petrified with amazement. He started to stammer out something, but the steward led him quickly away.

The steward grinned at his superior officer.

“Sure, you made a mistake, sir,” said he.

“Shut up!” said Jedson, and went to his bunk. He was tired out.



THE HABITS OF DEMOCRACY

ARTHUR L. VORYS, a regular and optimistic Republican, was voicing his opinion that in the next election the Democrats would repeat their many former experiences and bury their hopes at the polls. It reminded him of the experience of the middle-aged woman who went into a shop, and, without hesitation, made straight for the crape counter. The girl who handled this funereal material was extremely affable.

“We have a large stock of crapes,” she explained. “Let me show you some new French goods, very popular at this time for every kind of mourning, and designed to express every degree of grief. If you will tell me for whom you are in mourning, I can fix you out in exactly the right thing.”

“Husband,” replied the customer briefly.

“In that case,” said the girl graciously, “I can tell you just what——”

“Young lady,” interrupted the older woman angrily, “you needn’t bother yourself. This is the fourth husband I’ve buried, and I know all about it.”

The Peculiar Gifts of Mr. John T. Laxworthy

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Author of "The Tempting of Tavernake," "Peter Ruff and the Double Four," Etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE SERIES.

MR. JOHN T. LAXWORTHY: Chief of the trio of investigators. In appearance he is both unremarkable and undistinguished; he is of somewhat less than medium height, of unathletic, almost frail physique; his head is thrust a little forward, as though he were afflicted with a chronic stoop; he wears steel-rimmed spectacles; his hair and mustacho are iron-gray. "My chief aim," he tells his two associates, "is to make life tolerable for ourselves, to escape the dull monotony of idleness, and incidentally to embrace any opportunity which may present itself to enrich our exchequer."

MR. W. FORREST ANDERSON: Assistant to Mr. Laxworthy. A thoroughly British, self-satisfied gentleman; his figure is distinctly corpulent; he wears scarcely noticeable side whiskers, and his chin and upper lip are clean-shaven.

MR. SYDNEY WING: Assistant to Mr. Laxworthy. From the tips of his shiny tan shoes to his smoothly brushed hair he is unmistakable; he is young, he is English, he is well-bred, he is an athlete. His face is pleasant, unintelligent.

VIII.—THE DESERTED HOTEL

MR. FORREST ANDERSON, Mr. Sydney Wing, and Mr. Laxworthy himself were seated side by side on low canvas chairs at the extreme edge of a little strip of sand jutting out into the Mediterranean. About fifty yards behind them was a hotel built of white stone, with green shutters and balconies hung with flowers. Save themselves, there was no other human being in sight.

Mr. Laxworthy was reading with much apparent interest a volume of philosophy. Sydney Wing was throwing pebbles into the sea. Forrest Anderson was dozing. The day was warm, and the atmosphere relaxing. Sydney Wing threw his last pebble, gave a mighty yawn, and struck.

"Mr. Laxworthy, sir!"

Mr. Laxworthy frowned, and continued to read. When he had finished the sentence, however, he carefully marked his place, and turned a little in his chair.

"Well?"

Sydney Wing smiled a little apologetically.

"I am absolutely bored to death, sir."

Mr. Laxworthy looked at him steadfastly, and sighed.

"It is because you have no mind, young man," he declared severely. "You have no resources. You cannot enjoy solitude. Here we are cut off for a few days from all the distractions of life. There isn't a villa even in sight. Our hotel is practically empty. Instead of congratulating yourself upon having found such a spot, you find yourself bored."

"I admit it," Sydney confessed sadly. "Even a game of golf would cheer me up."

"You shall have it," Mr. Laxworthy promised him. "Within an hour, a motor car which I have hired for a month will arrive from Monte Carlo. You can drive yourself to Vallascure."

"A motor car!" Sydney murmured, his face lighting up. "For use?"

"Possibly," Mr. Laxworthy replied dryly.

"You said just now, sir, that the hotel was practically empty," the young man went on. "There surely isn't another soul staying there! We have lunched and dined there for three days, and the salon looks like a desert."

"It has a deserted appearance," Mr. Laxworthy admitted thoughtfully.

Mr. Forrest Anderson sat up suddenly in his chair.

"I will tell you something," he said. "There is something uncanny to me about one or two of those closed rooms upstairs. For three days we have not seen a soul except the waiters about the place. There has been no sign of any other guests. Yet sometimes in the corridors I have fancied that I heard voices. Yesterday morning I distinctly saw a face at the window of one of those rooms which they told us were dismantled. I can never pass down the corridor to my room without feeling that there is one living person at any rate close at hand."

Mr. Laxworthy regarded his friend with some interest.

"Really," he declared, "this is quite wonderful. I had no idea that you were developing gifts of this order. A man who can divine the presence of a human being behind a closed door is a man of parts, indeed!"

"You can make fun of me if you like," Mr. Forrest Anderson replied, unmoved. "Yesterday I met a waiter with a dinner tray on the landing. Where did he come from?"

"I could have sworn I heard a violin the other night," Sydney put in.

Mr. Laxworthy looked from one to the other.

"You amaze me!" he assured them. "You are both of you developing gifts and powers of observation which are perfectly astonishing. Anything else?"

Sydney Wing lit a cigarette.

"Rather 'getting at us,' aren't you, sir?" he remarked. "There's one thing: we're used to surprises. Think how you've treated us this time! You see this queer little hotel from the road, with its very notice board thrown down,

its drive thick with weeds, looking for all the world as though it were entirely deserted, and you insist that it is the one place in the Riviera for which you have been searching. We follow meekly, and have the utmost difficulty in persuading the landlord to give us any rooms at all. Yet here we have stayed for three days, and until this minute I don't think it has occurred to either Anderson or myself to wonder whether our coming was altogether as unexpected as it seemed."

Mr. Laxworthy took up his book.

"There are limits, I perceive, to this newly developed intelligence of yours," he said dryly. "Tell me, is this the landlord who comes to us from the hotel?"

Both men glanced round.

"It is the landlord," Sydney announced. "Monsieur Dreiche he calls himself, I believe."

"Quite a superior person," Mr. Laxworthy murmured. "One wonders that he is content to remain in such a place."

"I can't think why he doesn't advertise it or something," Sydney remarked. "It's a charming situation, and the hotel isn't badly furnished inside. Why they should let the grounds go to rack and ruin, just near the road, icks me."

"Your dawning powers of observation," Mr. Laxworthy whispered, "may lead you to connect this apparent carelessness with a marked reluctance of Monsieur Dreiche to receive us as guests."

"There does seem something queer about it," Mr. Forrest Anderson admitted, under his breath.

Monsieur Dreiche came down the boarded way across the shingle, and approached them hat in hand. He was a man of rather less than medium height, stout, with heavy black eyebrows, mustache, and imperial. His complexion was sallow, almost yellow, as though he had at some time suffered from jaundice. He walked heavily, his expression was gloomy, not to say anxious. His smile of politeness as he saluted his visitors was, without doubt, forced.

"We were just remarking," Mr. Lax-

worthy said, "how inexplicable it was that a hotel so charmingly situated as yours should be so neglected."

Monsieur Dreiche sighed.

"An affair of bad luck, monsieur, I am convinced," he replied. "Even now I come to you with trepidation. I received you here with reluctance, because, monsieur, it seemed to me scarcely honorable to accept guests in an empty hotel. When, however, I put this before you, you told me that it was solitude for which you were looking. The society of other guests would be distasteful. You gave me to understand, even, that the arrival of other guests would drive you away."

"I do not remember going quite as far as that," Mr. Laxworthy said. "But I certainly have no objection to solitude. We have been spending a few days in Monte Carlo, and we find the rest beneficial."

Monsieur Dreiche looked gloomier than ever.

"I have news for monsieur," he announced, "of the worst. Nevertheless, it is necessary to tell the truth. I have a party of guests who will arrive to-day. If monsieur appreciates the solitude of his surroundings—it is finished. These guests who come, they are not, alas! the most desirable. I bring the news with the deepest regret. Monsieur and his friends will doubtless decide to depart."

Mr. Laxworthy took off his spectacles, and rubbed them very carefully.

"How many of these guests will there be?" he inquired.

"Five or six, beyond a doubt, perhaps more," Monsieur Dreiche told him sadly. "But for this wretched season I would have denied them. I know well that they are noisy and ill-mannered."

Mr. Laxworthy sighed.

"We will remain for a day or so longer, at any rate," he announced. "We will see what the inconvenience of their coming amounts to. It would be unfair to leave so hastily."

The smile on Monsieur Dreiche's lips was a little sickly.

"There is, alas! another matter, monsieur," he continued. "These people

selected their rooms a month ago. They comprise the suites at present occupied by monsieur and his friends."

Mr. Laxworthy frowned.

"But it is absurd, this," he declared testily. "We're in possession, and we shall not move—not to-day, at any rate; perhaps not to-morrow. We await events. At your service, Monsieur Dreiche."

Mr. Laxworthy picked up his book, and waved his hand. The hotel proprietor very slowly returned to his hotel.

"We're in the way," Sydney Wing murmured.

"I thought that we might be," Mr. Laxworthy assented, as he settled himself down once more to read.

Luncheon that day, in marked contrast with its predecessors, was an almost impossible meal. The omelette was burned, the cutlets almost raw, and the service abominable. Curiously enough, all this seemed to afford Mr. Laxworthy the utmost satisfaction.

"We're to be starved out," he declared cheerfully. "Never mind. It is only for a day. If anything comes of our little visit here, it will be all over within twenty-four hours or so."

"There is at least bread and butter," Sydney Wing groaned, tapping a roll.

Presently the manager sought them out once more, carrying this time an open telegram in his hand.

"Mr. Laxworthy," he began, "I am desolated. But my guests who are coming insist upon the rooms they themselves selected, and so much of my hotel is dismantled that I have no other apartments fit to offer. My friend, the manager of the Grand Hotel at Vallascure, telephones me that he will be delighted to receive monsieur and his friends. Monsieur, I am sure, will find his hotel most comfortable."

"When I go to it I dare say I shall," Mr. Laxworthy replied. "For two days I remain here. That is settled. If you turn us out of our rooms, a course against which I protest most vigorously, it will be necessary for you to find us others."

Monsieur Dreiche turned away, baffled. Mr. Laxworthy had imparted a certain amount of irritation to his manner which seemed wholly in keeping with his appearance. It is without doubt a fact that the hotel proprietor, as he retired disconsolately to his office, had no suspicion that he had any one else to deal with in this matter than an obstinate, crotchety Englishman.

At about half past ten that evening Mr. Laxworthy and Mr. Forrest Anderson left the smoking room together. Instead, however, of following his usual custom of retiring for the night, Mr. Laxworthy took down his coat and shawl.

"The moonlight is wonderful," he declared. "We will walk for half an hour on the sands. Where is Sydney?"

"Out looking the car over," Mr. Forrest Anderson replied.

Mr. Laxworthy nodded approvingly. "We will fetch him," he said. "There is a way to the garage through the shrubbery."

They found Sydney, who had completed his task, seated outside the garage, smoking.

"Bully car," he pronounced. "I can get forty out of her, if necessary, even on these roads."

"She is ready to start?" Mr. Laxworthy asked.

"With a turn of the wrist."

"Very good. We will now walk together on that strip of sand by the sea. I have a fancy for that spot, for it is the one place where we could not possibly be overheard."

"You have something to tell us?" Sydney demanded eagerly.

"Less, a great deal, than you are expecting to hear," Mr. Laxworthy replied dryly. "However, the time has come for my confession. You are wondering why I brought you here, you are wondering why I refuse to leave. Frankly, I do not know. I can only tell you this: There is a man hiding here, and I can't imagine why. There are guests expected here to-night, connected in some way with this man, and I have no idea why they are

coming. The whole affair may be of absolutely no importance. We may have wasted our time here completely. On the other hand, I object to coincidences which I do not understand. Listen!"

The three men stood perfectly motionless. The whole of the front of the hotel was dark, except for one window at the end of the row, from which came a faint, glimmering light. The window was open, and through it came floating out very softly upon the moonlight stillness a breath of very faint, very sweet music. Some one was playing the violin, playing very quietly, but with exquisite skill. The music grew and grew, becoming stranger and more passionate with every note. The three men stood entranced.

"Our mysterious neighbor at last," Sydney murmured.

Gradually the music died away. Then there was silence. Something seemed to have passed from the beauty of the night. The perfume of the mimosa was hardly so sweet. Some quality of softness seemed to have gone from the atmosphere, and the stars hung in the cloudless sky, and reflected as far as they could see across the deep blue sea.

Mr. Laxworthy drew his shawl a little closer around his shoulders.

"The fellow plays like a magician," he muttered.

"He is surely a great master!" Forrest Anderson exclaimed.

"He is the *chef d'orchestre* at Décat's restaurant, or rather he was until a few nights ago," Mr. Laxworthy replied dryly.

"A *chef d'orchestre*!" Sydney repeated incredulously. "What on earth is he doing here, then?"

Mr. Laxworthy smiled amiably.

"Precisely the question I ask myself. The man is in hiding. Why?"

"Got into trouble at Monte, I should think," Forrest Anderson suggested. "He's a foreigner, I suppose, and a foreigner who can make music like that must have temperament. He's probably been using his knife."

Mr. Laxworthy shook his head.

"So far as one could gather from a

few casual inquiries," he declared, "the man's character is irreproachable. He has a quieter manner than most of his kind, and has a reputation for being ambitious. Monsieur Décat, for example, made but one complaint of him. He sought, without a doubt, to attract the attention of the wealthy ladies who frequented the restaurant. He abandoned his post at a moment's notice. Décat replaced him with infinite regret. He left Monte Carlo openly. There is not a word spoken against him."

"In my opinion," Mr. Forrest Anderson said, "we are going very soon to find ourselves *de trop* here. It is probably a love affair, and the fellow has come here to meet the inamorata."

"That view of the situation has occurred to me," Mr. Laxworthy confessed. "On the other hand, why this desire on the part of the hotel proprietor to get rid of us? Why this secrecy concerning the man's presence here? Why, too, should these expected guests arrive by water?"

"How do you know that they are going to?" Sydney asked.

"This afternoon," Mr. Laxworthy pointed out, "a new rope has been affixed to that little landing stage. Since dinner time Monsieur Dreiche has walked down here, looking toward the point, at least a dozen times. These things are not for nothing. The visitors will arrive by water from Monte Carlo."

"After all, it may be only an elopement," Sydney suggested.

"There are many kinds of elopements," Mr. Laxworthy retorted grimly.

The three men presently returned to the house. Their rooms all looked toward the sea, and were in line with the one from which the music had issued.

"I must confess," Mr. Laxworthy said, "that the arrival of these guests interests me to such an extent that I shall not retire for the present. I do not imagine that anything will happen to-night, but it would be wise, I think, if you others followed my example."

"Are we likely to want the car?" Sydney inquired.

"One never knows," Mr. Laxworthy replied thoughtfully.

"I'll sleep in her, at any rate," Sydney declared. "If you want me I shall be on hand."

The hours of the night passed peacefully and uneventfully away. The full yellow light faded from the stars, the moon became colorless. The faintest of gray mists hung upon the water. In the east the clouds began to break, and a ripple of wind passed across the sea.

Suddenly those who watched were rewarded for their vigil. A dark object glided round the point, and came rushing in toward the shore. Almost as it appeared the music recommenced. The man in the end room was standing up now. Mr. Laxworthy could see him distinctly, could trace the fierce upward curl of his mustache, the white face, the burning eyes. The tone of his music had changed. It was becoming now a pæan of welcome. Then from the boat came a cry. Mr. Laxworthy heard it, and smiled. It was the key to the whole situation. The cry was one of wonder, but underneath it there was fear. That cry was his justification.

The boat glided up to the landing stage. The little party disembarked in the glimmering twilight. There were only three passengers—two men and a girl. The latter had almost to be lifted out. They came very slowly up the little strip of sand, the girl apparently protesting all the time. Then, when they were about twenty yards from the front door of the hotel, a figure suddenly emerged, running toward them. It was the musician.

"Mademoiselle, dear mademoiselle!" he exclaimed, with an exaggerated gesture of great joy, "you have come to me! It is the morning of my life, this! I kiss your hands, dear mademoiselle."

She placed her hands firmly behind her. Even in that dim, ghostly twilight the three men who watched could see that she was tall and fair. Her tone was full of angry contempt.

"Come to you, indeed! You must be mad. I came because they told me that my father was here, that he'd had an accident. Is this a trick?"

The musician pressed toward her.

"Dear mademoiselle," he pleaded, "it is no trick. It is the call of my heart to yours. No longer could I play at Décat's, piping for a word with you, a touch of your fingers. I have had your messages, mademoiselle; I have seen the light flash from your eyes to my little balcony. But these things are not enough for one of my disposition. They are not enough for one who loves. Mademoiselle, be kind to me, I pray. I am only a poor artist, but there is no one in your great world who could love as I."

"Artist, indeed!" the girl retorted. "I should call you a mountebank! The messages I sent were simply to the maker of music which pleased me for a moment. They had nothing to do with the man. Stand out of the way, please. In your balcony at Décat's you are in your place. Here you annoy me."

The musician stood quivering with rage, his face convulsed with passion. He looked like some evil thing. The men who stood on either side of the young woman were grinning at his discomfiture.

"Mademoiselle will regret!" he declared fiercely. "I sent her the message we agreed upon," he added, turning a little, as though to appeal to the others. "She leaves her yacht to come to me. Now caprice has seized her. Is it that you are a coquette, after all, mademoiselle? Is it that you have indeed forgotten that next my heart reposes the flower you sent me—the flower which your lips have touched?"

"You are an idiot," the girl declared scornfully. "I'm not sure that you are not also a knave. I insist upon being told whether your message was a trick. Is my father here, or is he not?"

The door of the hotel had opened. It was Monsieur Dreiche who came out. He bowed low to mademoiselle.

"Mademoiselle will be pleased to enter," he begged. "There are other guests in the hotel, and one fears to disturb them."

The girl did not move.

"Are you the proprietor?" she demanded.

"At your service, mademoiselle."

"Will you tell me at once whether my father, Mr. Gilbert Powers, is here?"

Monsieur Dreiche shook his head slowly.

"No, 'mademoiselle,'" he replied. "There is certainly no gentleman of that name in the hotel."

She turned to the two men who had brought her from the boat.

"Am I to believe, then," she cried angrily, "that I have been brought here by a trick? These men came to the yacht, and told me that my father was lying here, badly hurt. What does it mean?"

—There was a moment's complete silence. A very ugly smile had parted the lips of the musician. Monsieur Dreiche's expression of incredulity was excellent. He turned to the man in oil-skins, who had driven the launch.

"Henri," he asked, "is this true?"

The man shook his head.

"But assuredly not," he answered. "The message which I gave to mademoiselle was that Antoine awaited her here—Antoine, our brother. I handed her a note from him, begging her to come. A priest, he told her, was arranged for. Mademoiselle unfortunately dropped the note on the deck of the yacht as she descended."

For the first time the girl seemed terrified. She looked around her, as though searching for a friendly face, in vain.

"My father is not here!" she gasped. "It is indeed a plot, this!"

Once more the musician approached her. His conceit was so amazing that he had already forgotten the scorn of her words. He bent toward her in the twilight.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he pleaded, "dear lady of my dreams, forgive me if I have schemed just a little to win so great a happiness. These are my brothers—Henri, who brought you here in the launch; Charles, who owns this hotel. I come to them, and I tell them how things are between you and me, how we love, but how impossible it is to meet, that your father is a millionaire, and you, alas! are never alone. We make this little plot between us. It is

for the happiness of both of us, dear. Everything has been arranged, the priest is at hand. By to-morrow night we can be in Paris. Then I will play to you all my life, I will teach you new music, I will——”

His sentence ended in a howl of rage. The girl had leaned forward, and struck him across the mouth with the palm of her hand. Her eyes were blazing.

“You are a lunatic!” she exclaimed fiercely. “I have smiled at you once or twice, because your music pleased me. I sent you a flower one night because I hesitated to give you money. Whatever more you have imagined is simply the result of your stupid vanity. If you are indeed the manager of the hotel, monsieur,” she added, turning to Monsieur Dreiche, “you will order these men to take me straight back to my yacht.”

Monsieur Dreiche was silent for a moment.

“Mademoiselle,” he said slowly, “pray consider. The note, signed, ‘Antoine, your lover,’ will be found upon the yacht. You have said hard things to Antoine to-night, but I cannot believe that you mean them all. You are here, the tide has turned, you cannot return. Poor Antoine adores you. Take his hand and be reconciled, mademoiselle, and let me send for the priest.”

“Do you seriously believe,” the girl cried furiously, “that I would marry a monkey like that?”

“Mademoiselle,” the hotel proprietor replied, making a little sign to the others, “for a young lady in your position marriage with an artist, even a poor one, is better than——”

“Than what?” she demanded.

No one answered. The two men had drawn nearer.

“Mademoiselle will enter the hotel,” Monsieur Dreiche insisted. “We can talk out here no longer. We shall disturb our other guests,” he added, with a half-fearful glance up at the three open windows beneath which they were standing.

“I refuse to set my foot inside the place,” the girl declared.

Monsieur Dreiche gave a little sign. In a moment she was seized from be-

hind. Antoine’s hand was upon her mouth.

“Bring her to the hotel,” he ordered. “She shall be tamed.”

They had barely dragged her a single yard before they stopped short. Several most amazing things were happening. There was suddenly the low hum of a motor, and Sydney, seated in a gray car, emerged from the garage, and came sweeping up to the door of the hotel. Mr. Laxworthy and Mr. Forrest Anderson appeared on the threshold. The former came slowly toward the little group who were standing like stone figures upon the gravel front.

“Monsieur Dreiche,” Mr. Laxworthy remarked, “I regret that I cannot possibly remain any longer in a hotel where conversations of such length are carried on at five o’clock in the morning beneath my window.”

“Monsieur departs,” the hotel proprietor faltered.

“It has occurred to me that notwithstanding the warmth of her reception, mademoiselle might care to accompany me,” Mr. Laxworthy continued.

She gave a little cry and held out her arms.

“You will save me?” she implored. “You will take me away from this hateful place?”

Monsieur Dreiche put two fingers in his mouth, and whistled. Almost immediately several men came stealing out from the house.

“It is a family affair, this,” Monsieur Dreiche declared harshly. “You and your friends can go. I am well pleased to have you depart. But the young lady remains.”

Antoine struck an attitude.

“If any one dares to take her from me,” he cried, “they shall answer to me for it, if necessary with their life!”

Mr. Laxworthy had taken up a strategic position with his back to the motor car. Very slowly his right hand came out of his overcoat pocket. With a yell of terror, Antoine leaped into the air. A bullet had whistled close to his head.

“I only wish to remark,” Mr. Lax-

worthy went on, "that I am accustomed to having my own way, and my pistol is automatic. I have attained, also, a certain proficiency in its use which might easily lead to disastrous results. I think that you had better release the young lady."

The two men who were holding her promptly abandoned their grasp. Mr. Laxworthy with his left hand assisted her into the motor. The little body of men closed in upon them. One man had rushed into the house. Antoine was whispering to his brother in oil-skins.

"Monsieur Dreiche," Mr. Laxworthy said sternly, "I have no certain compromise to offer you, but if this young lady takes my advice the affair will remain as it is. If, on the other hand, our departure is interfered with in any manner, there will be reprisals."

Monsieur Dreiche did not hesitate. He stood back and raised his hat.

"A little misunderstanding," he murmured; "a lover's quarrel, perhaps, which is better finished. Monsieur and

his friends will return some day, I trust."

The car swung up the avenue, and into the road. The girl, who was gripping Mr. Laxworthy's hand, had begun now to sob.

"Tell me who you are," she begged. "How did you come there?"

"I am just an incident," Mr. Laxworthy remarked. "In Monte Carlo I happened to hear a few words pass between that fiddle player and his brother. I saw you in the restaurant, too, and I noticed the way Antoine, as he calls himself, watched you. Let me give you a word of advice, young lady. May I?"

"I was an idiot," she murmured. "Yes, please do!"

"When the music of a person of that class pleases you, remember that it is wiser to let your mankind offer cigars than to send a flower from yourself. Those fiddlers are all eaten up with conceit. They don't understand."

The girl smiled through her tears.

"You know, I believe you're right," she admitted.

You will hear about Mr. Laxworthy's investigation of THE STETSON AFFAIR in the September Month-end POPULAR on sale two weeks hence, August 23rd.



PERCY HEATH TAKES A RIDE

PERCY HEATH is Henry W. Savage's crack publicity man. Whenever Savage wants to have a play advertised all over the country in every newspaper in every conceivable way, he turns Percy loose, and tells him to clean up on the proposition. And Percy delivers the goods. A short while ago Savage was told that the press agent for one of his plays in the West was very ill.

"Well," he said, "Heath is out in that territory. Just telegraph him to leave his present post and take up this other show."

Heath is an impulsive young man. Having received his instructions, he took the train, arrived in the new town, and chartered a touring car to take him to the hospital where his fellow agent was ill. Before he got to the hospital he was under arrest and a cloud of gloom.

"Nothing much happened on that ride," he explained afterward, "nothing much but tragedy. That boneheaded chauffeur ran over a dog, cut a wing off a chicken, and killed a Chinaman. It seems to me I do nothing but have accidents everywhere I go. There is no clause in my contract requiring me to kill Chinamen or to advertise the play by being thrown into jail."

Moonshine

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "The Red Mouse," "The Running Fight," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

Two revenue officers invade Crooked Run in the Southern mountains, looking for a reported illicit still. They stop at Jeff Parlamon's, who runs it, and try to buy some "white lickker" as evidence. But Moonshine, his pretty daughter, is suspicious and gives them only water. Harney Leveridge, a young mountaineer, and Welch Honaker, the school teacher who helps Jeff run the still, interfere at this point and force the officers to leave. As they are riding away Welch shoots at one of them, Jim Eccles, and later arranges matters so that Harney has to shoulder the blame. The inspector at headquarters after hearing Eccles' story decides to put the best man in the service on the trail. Both Harney and Welch are in love with Moonshine, and the former gets Welch to write the girl a love letter for him. Welch, at heart a bad character, tells Moonshine that Harney has been making love to a poor half-witted girl, Tacy Ann Jarrett. Moonshine refuses to believe him.

CHAPTER VI.

MOOONSHINE PARLAMON was accustomed to the lonely nights. She had grown somehow to be fond of them. It seemed to her that in the solitude that was left her she lived quite another life—she seemed quite another Moonshine.

"Being alone nights," she told Jeff, "seems to do you good. You can catch up with yourself somehow when you're alone."

It was in the lonely hours that she had first rebelled against Welch Honaker's crude school-teaching. In the lonely hours she allowed herself certain unwonted pleasures. There was Godey's "Lady's Book" to be pored over. There was a thumb-marked "Three Years with the Poets"—and Moonshine Parlamon knew to just which pages she should turn to treat herself to varying emotions. There were bits of home lore, verses of self-sacrifice. And then there were the other kind of poems that made her think unconsciously of Harney Leveridge.

She had another book, "John Halifax, Gentleman"—she had lost herself in it

night after night. At other times she would sit and wonder vaguely—wonder why Harney Leveridge's teeth were white and everybody's else teeth were yellow—wonder why all Crooked Run rubbed burned tobacco on its gums and snuffed it up its nostrils. She took her mother's picture—an old faded daguerreotype—down from the mantel, and wondered vaguely whether her mother's teeth had been white or yellow.

"They must have been white," she whispered to herself, "to go with the rest of my maw."

She opened Godey's "Lady's Book," and compared the faded daguerreotype with the highly colored fashion plates. She weighed the advantages and disadvantages of each in silence for a long while. Then she addressed the daguerreotype as if it were a person.

"Maw," she said, "there ain't one of them can hold a candle to you. I ain't never had the chance of knowing you, but I'll bet there ain't nobody prettier nor nicer, not in Washington. If I could only be as nice as you!"

Her thoughts were not all impersonal. Stealthily and guiltily she stole toward the little mirror in the corner, and gazed long and earnestly—not without vanity

—at her counterfeit presentment. She wondered vaguely whether in the eyes of other people—Harney Leveridge, for instance—she had the same appearance as did her sisters of Crooked Run. She had never dared to assert to herself that she had good looks—she only hoped she had them.

If she had them—if she was right about herself—then why weren't the rest of the people like her? Why weren't they like her mother? Why weren't they like the stylish ladies in Godey's "Lady's Book"?

It brought her back to Harney Leveridge's white teeth. Why did the women smoke their pipes? Why did the men drink white liquor? She smiled into her mother's face as she wondered at it all.

"Maybe," she ventured to the daguerreotype, "maybe we are different because we don't ever use snuff and tobacco, and don't drink, and all that, maw. Maybe that's the reason."

Her mind traveled rapidly over the events of the afternoon. There had been a momentary eagerness in the faces of Keg Ferguson and his friend when she had placed before them the two glasses. She had seen that look in the faces of other men before—had seen it in the eyes of her own father—had noted it in the very countenance of Welch Honaker that night. It came back to her in all her wondering. Why did Jeff Parlamon make white liquor? Why did the government try to stop him? Why did men drive miles over the mountain to get it? Was it all this—tobacco, snuff, and white liquor—that made Crooked Run—that made Ellenbogen—that made the whole mountain different from Godey's "Lady's Book"—different from "John Halifax, Gentleman"?

With a sigh, Moonshine picked up her mother's portrait from the table, where the full light of the lamp shone upon it, and replaced it on the mantelpiece. As she did so, something white fluttered to the ground—a folded piece of paper.

Involuntarily she stooped and picked it up; then she drew back, afraid.

"What can it be?" she said aloud. "It was not there before."

In this she was mistaken. It had been there for many minutes. That she was disconcerted was, however, a fact not to be wondered at. She knew the contents of that mantelpiece by heart. In Jeff Parlamon's well-ordered shack there was a place for everything, and everything was in its place.

"It don't belong there, anyhow," she told herself.

Once more she leaned over and gingerly picked it up, and carried it quite as gingerly to the table, in the full glare of the lamplight. And then her heart stood still.

It was a single sheet, folded in twain, and with the corner turned down to retain the fold. On the outside of it, in labored script, appeared two words:

Moonshine Parlamon.

"It's a letter!" cried Moonshine, quite aghast. "Somebody has sent a letter to me!"

For a long while she stared at it on both sides; then slowly and cautiously she opened it.

"A letter from New York!" she gasped.

Not once did she glance at the signature. Slowly and carefully she read it word by word. This is what she read:

342 Fifth Avenue, New York, July 5, 1864.

MY OWN DARLING WIFE THAT IS TO BE:
Let me implore of you to name the day that will make us one—that day which is to bring us together for all time. You blushed last night when I urged the question, and put me off with some pretty but pitiful excuse. For once, darling, let me dictate, and say Wednesday. Won't you, my precious pet?

Yours, HARNEY LEVERIDGE.

When she had finished it, with flushed face and thumping heart, her first sensation was one of complete bewilderment.

"Makes me feel just like 'John Halifax, Gentleman,'" she whispered to herself. And then she read it over again—once, twice, thrice.

With quick feminine intuition, she brushed aside all of its inconsistencies and absurdities. Out from that soiled and thumb-marked scrap of paper there

leaped two things that set her brain on fire: The first part, and the last—"My own darling wife that is to be," and the signature, "Harney Leveridge."

The rest was all a blur. Suddenly she hid her face in her hands.

"I cain't believe it!" she kept repeating to herself. "It cain't be true."

Again she sought the missive. It was still there in black and white.

"He wrote it down," she assured herself, "and he put his name to it, and there it is."

She sat there, now laughing, now sobbing hysterically, with burning eyes and burning face. Her hands grew cold. For a long while she sat there, bewildered, hypnotized by the excitement and the warmth that raged within her.

At last, with a start, she rose, and darted to the little mirror. She stood there quivering, staring into her own eyes. She laughed silently, and flung her arms into the air.

"He loves me—he loves me!" she cried hysterically. "What is the matter with me? I cain't sense it all. There ain't enough of me to feel it all. I cain't—I haven't got enough joy in me. I want to feel it all—and I cain't."

She stopped herself in the midst of her excitement, and came down to earth. What she needed was something to do—something to put her hands to. If she could scrub the floor, or wash another pan of dishes, she felt that that might help. She looked about her. Everything was as tidy as could be, and yet on the corner of the mantelpiece was something that belonged elsewhere. Welch Honaker had placed it there; it was the empty glass out of which he had drunk Jeff Parlamon's white liquor.

Still tingling with excitement, but forcing the housewife that was in her to the front, Moonshine seized this glass, and started toward a pan of water. As she did so, a faint odor assailed her. She held the glass nearer and nearer still. There was an appeal in that odor that she did not understand. In her hysterical state something within her responded to it.

Her mind traveled slowly, vaguely over a well-worn path. "What makes

Welch Honaker drink white liquor?" she said to herself. "What makes them all drink white liquor?"

She was about to plunge the glass into the cool, clear water, but she hesitated in the very act. Without knowing why, she turned to the shelf, deftly tilted a jug on edge, and as deftly caught some of its contents in the glass.

Her face still burned. Her breath came quick and fast. Hysteria still held her within its clutch. And yet she was wondering—merely wondering. Her hand trembled still with excitement as she placed the glass to her lips and it clinked against her teeth as she tilted it.

In another instant she had thrust it hastily from her and placed it on the shelf. Breathlessly she gasped, coughed, spluttered. Hardly a drop had passed her lips; but a drop was sufficient to cause the ensuing shock.

Yes, that was the taste of white liquor—she recalled it now. They had fed it to her when a child, when she was sick, propped up in bed—mixed with water possibly, or sugar. She shuddered with the flavor of it. It took her moments to recover her equilibrium. The disagreeable experience set her to wondering still more. She no longer wondered why Welch Honaker drank white liquor—she wondered how he could drink it.

In the midst of it she went off wondering, and went back to Harney's letter. Once more her nerves tingled with excitement. Once more she felt as though there was not sufficient joy within her. Something within her cried for joy, more joy, and yet more joy. Why couldn't she feel all that she wanted to feel? The tip end of her little red tongue stole out and licked the telltale flavor from her lips.

Without knowing exactly why, she found herself throwing wide open the door of the little corner cupboard.

Jeff Parlamon's household was one of the few in Crooked Run that kept a constant supply of table delicacies—among them sugar. There was one reason for it—Jeff used sugar in his business.

Moonshine Parlamon lifted the

cracked and crazy little sugar bowl from the shelf, and poured a liberal quantity into a thick and heavy tumbler. She kept telling herself that she would have to find out. She had found out a good many things in the long nights; but she had never found out this—why men liked white liquor.

Once more she tilted the jug upon the shelf, and covered the sugar with a liberal portion of its contents. She had often mixed this dose for Jeff during one of his winter colds. She stirred the sugar with a pewter spoon like mad, then she plunged a tin dipper into a pail of sparkling water, and filled the glass nearly to the brim. Then she raised it to her lips, and sipped once more.

Once more she shuddered, and thrust it from her; but she had accomplished part, at least, of what she had intended—she had swallowed a goodly portion of the contents of the glass.

For an instant she was obsessed merely with a strange feeling of curiosity and wonder. Slowly she set the glass back upon its shelf. In the next moment she had gripped the table's edge with both hands. She stared before her into space. She stood thus, rigid, silent, with a sense of shock upon her—shock purely physical.

Silently, wonderingly she waited, and as she waited, slowly but certainly, there crept over her some uncanny change; she felt herself lifted to another plane of existence, transformed into another Moonshine. At this juncture she had a curious feeling, never to be explained, that she was standing side by side with herself—that there were two Moonshines. Once, as she afterward remembered, it seemed to her that she had become suddenly her own mother.

In all of this there was no faltering, no physical uncertainty. With steady hand, with nerves as rigid as a rock, once more she lifted the sweetened mixture to her lips.

After an interval she stirred another draft—

Suddenly she came back to herself—remembered through a mist of bewilderment what had gone before. It was

the sight of Harney's letter that accomplished this.

Harney Leveridge—she remembered now—he had called her his darling wife to be—he was making love to her.

Suddenly, as though by magic, she found the full expression of the joy that was within her. The mists, the uncertainties all cleared away, and left her there alone with the ecstasy that was hers by right.

She looked about her. Her breath was coming thick and fast. The big, rambling room seemed close and stifling. Its walls were closing in upon her. Her glance strayed to the door that led into the garden. Beyond that door lay the freedom that she sought.

With the lithe and graceful movement of a fawn, Moonshine Parlamon darted across the big room, and flung wide the door. As she did so, she drew a deep breath, for she was bathed in the rays of the full moon. She stretched her slender arms toward the heavens, and stood thus, a statue in the moonlight, for a moment.

Then slowly, almost unconsciously, she began to croon a homely little love song—a melody that had come down to her from her mother. It was a song that was meant for something more than voice. Its meter melted into motion.

Moonshine stood swaying gently to the rhythm of it, her voice growing stronger and stronger as she sang. Then, like a wood nymph, secure and unafraid in her loneliness on the edge of the forest, Moonshine began to dance—danced as she had never danced before—surrendered herself in wild abandon to the joy that was within her.

The moon was two hours older possibly when a burly figure, with his lantern slung against his shoulder, clambered stealthily from the broad mouth of the well and crouched behind the bushes. With a sudden jerk, he extinguished his light. Then cautiously he thrust his head and shoulders into the open, and crouched there, watching, listening.

Moonshine Parlamon, like a mountain sprite, was still singing her love

songs to the moon. Still she swayed and darted litlingly, rhythmically to and fro across the open space.

The sight was too bewitching, too bewildering for the eyes of man to behold.

Suddenly the man crouching in the clump of bushes darted to the mouth of the well. In the depths two lanterns flickered. He muttered an exclamation, and then, drawing himself to his full height, dashed heavily from his retreat, across the open space of ground, and caught Moonshine in his arms.

The girl uttered one muffled shriek, struggled wildly for an instant, glanced into the face of her captor, and then, with a deep sigh born of physical exhaustion, sank, unconscious, into his arms.

Without a word, the man drew her swiftly into the room that she had left, bolted the door behind him, and extinguished the lights. For an instant he peered through the little window, watching for the lanterns; then, as though satisfied at the momentary silence, still with the girl in his arms, he climbed clumsily, wearily to the floor above.

With the tenderness of a mother, he laid her gently on her couch. For one instant he hung hovering above her face; then he crumpled down at the foot of the bed, an inert figure in the moonlight.

"Moonshine," he groaned to himself, "Moonshine, my little gal, you're plumb crazy to do a think like that."

How long he remained thus he did not know, but when he came to himself once more the moon, still on its way to the horizon, was bathing the girl's face in its white light. He rose and drew his hand across her forehead.

"Don't you know that yo' maw—she died of—"

He did not finish the sentence. Instead, he drew toward the bed a crazy little three-legged stool of Moonshine's, and seated himself upon it, his huge figure shading hers from the rays of the fading moon.

"Cain't let you git moonstruck, too," he whispered to himself. He sat thus motionless far into the dawn.

Suddenly the girl stirred, opened her eyes wide, and looked him full in the face. She struggled to a sitting posture, glanced at her gown, cast a startled look about the crazy little room, and then buried her face deep into her pillow.

"Tired, tired," she moaned, in a choking voice, "so tired!"

Jeff Parlamon rested his huge hand tenderly upon her smaller one, and waited patiently. After a while the heavy silence was broken by a sharp rap on the door below. Moonshine turned and clutched her father by the arm.

"Don't let anybody in," she pleaded. "Tell them to go away."

Jeff waited for the second summons; then heavily and wearily he descended the crazy stairs and opened the door. A moment later he was back again.

"It's only Harney Leveridge," he said.

Moonshine sprang from her pillow. "You didn't let him in?" she demanded, in an agony of apprehension.

Jeff drew her gently down again, and held both her hands in his.

"You kin rest easy," he responded. "I didn't let him in."

The name of Harney Leveridge had taken the memory of Moonshine Parlamon over the road that she had traveled. She withdrew her hands, and pressed them tightly against her head.

"Pap," she whispered, in bewilderment, "how did it all come about? There's things that won't come back—things that I cain't remember."

Jeff was silent for a moment. He did not know just how to begin.

"It come about," he said, at length, "that I come back from work—I come first, and Welch and Harney they come after."

Moonshine shuddered. "They didn't see?" she demanded, almost in a shriek. "They don't know anything, do they, pap?" She shook his arm in sudden feminine appeal. "What was there to see?" she cried. "Make me remember, pap—bring it back to me."

Jeff held his face in his hands for a moment, and when he looked at her again it seemed to her as though ten years had been added to his life. He seemed like an old, old man.

"Thar wasn't nothin' to be seen, honey," he went on slowly, "exceptin' what was fine and pretty as a picture. It was somehow like a dream. Many's the time, honey, that I see you dance for me, and many's the time that I hear you sing for me; but you never sang for me and you never danced for me as you did last night. It was wild, honey—it was like the moon had struck you—jest like that."

Moonshine stared at him as though fascinated. She was beginning to remember.

"It was white liquor, pappy," she said, in low, awed tones. "I tasted some to see what it was like."

"You found out!" exclaimed Jeff grimly.

"Pappy," she cried, crouching miserably against his shoulder, "was I jest plain drunk?"

Jeff placed his strong arm about her. "You weren't jest plain drunk, honey," he returned; "you were crazy drunk, that's all. You were wild, honey; you were in the clouds, just like the moon had struck you. How did you ever come to do it, honey?" he demanded.

Moonshine pressed one hand against the bosom of her dress. The pressure brought forth an answering rustle—Harney's letter was still safely there.

"I cain't tell you how it came about," wailed Moonshine, hiding her face from Jeff's. "I jest cain't tell you. Something told me to drink white liquor, and I tasted it; and something told me to keep on tasting it, so I took some more." She struggled with her memory for a moment. "And then, after a while, something made me sing, and something made me dance." She glanced now beseechingly into Jeff's eyes. "Is that all white liquor does to a body, pap?" she asked. "Jest makes them sing and makes them dance?"

Jeff turned his grizzly head, and stared out of the window far across the mountain.

"Mebbe," he ventured, talking thickly, for somehow a dull, heavy pain was settling down upon him, "mebbe I oughter tell you about yo' maw—"

A startled glance leaped from the

eyes of Moonshine. "What about her?" she demanded, curiously eager.

Jeff held her head close against his shoulder. "I'll tell you about yo' maw, honey," he went on slowly, painfully. "Yo' maw—you see, yo' maw—she died of—"

"If I could only die!" moaned the girl contritely.

"She died," ventured Jeff again. "How can I tell her?" he groaned within himself.

Moonshine waited, trembling. "Go on, pap," she breathed.

"It's thisaway," slowly proceeded her father: "Yo' maw—well, she was—" He drew a deep breath of relief as he went on: "Well, thar wasn't nobody could sing like yo' maw, and thar wasn't nobody could dance like her; and last night, honey, when I saw you dance an' heard you sing, I thought at first you was yo' maw, and it pulled me down, honey, because yo' maw, she died—and I hain't got nobody but you left—I hain't agwine to tell her," he confided to himself.

Moonshine drew away from him, and crouched against the headpiece at the farther corner of the bed. She stared into his eyes, but not at him. She seemed to be looking through and through him far off into the vistas. He held his gaze fastened dumbly, painfully upon her. He could not know what was passing in her mind—did not understand that behind the pallor of her face and the feverish glow of her eyes, her mind was working rapidly to some strange and logical conclusion.

For a moment that seemed hours almost, the two stared blankly at each other. Then, with a sudden and unexpected spring, Moonshine darted once more toward her father, and caught him firmly but spasmodically by the shoulders.

"I tell you," she cried shrilly, but with unwonted intensity in her voice, "I tell you, I know—why folks like to drink white liquor—why they want to get drunk!" Her eyes glowed as with fire. "I know," she went on. Her clutch tightened upon him. "It's dangerous, I tell you!" she almost shrieked. "It's

dangerous! Pappy, pappy," she cried, with a sudden wild appeal in her voice, "you got to quit the still!"

CHAPTER VII.

It was a week later. It was midnight. Moonshine found herself sitting suddenly upright in bed. Something, she knew not what, had startled her out of heavy slumber. She peered across the room. There was no moon now. The night was dark as pitch within and without. She listened, silent, motionless. She never was afraid save when awakened suddenly. Some uncanny fear had descended on her now.

Suddenly her heart stood still. "What is that?" she cried.

Out of the still night air came a weird moan—a wail; then from below she heard the brushing of somebody against the shack, and three feeble knocks upon the door.

With some unexplained terror still clinging to her, Moonshine sprang from her bed, darted to the corner where she kept her rifle, and crept into her father's room. It took much shaking to arouse him. At last, half awakened, he, too, leaped to his feet, almost knocking her over in his long-armed reach for his rifle.

"It's you, honey," he whispered, a bit awed himself by the silence of the night. "What's the trouble, Moonshine?"

She caught his hand in the darkness. "Be quiet for a minute," she commanded.

Side by side they listened, and then they heard it once again—the moans, the whimpering wail, the feeble but insistent knocking on the door below.

Jeff felt for the trigger of his gun, and held his finger on it as he descended the narrow, rickety stairway. Moonshine followed him, waiting on the stairs. She could see the shadowy outline of her father as he waited, listening, at the door.

"Who's thar?" he cried at length.

There was a whimpering jargon from without.

"It's a woman in distress," whispered Jeff through the darkness.

He drew the bolts and threw wide the door. A dim and somewhat bulky shadow lurched, staggering, inward, sinking at his feet.

Jeff Parlomon clutched this figure tightly and held his glance upon the door.

"Honey," he said to Moonshine, "you'd better make a light."

In another moment, Moonshine, lamp in hand, stood staring curiously at the huddled object.

"Well," she cried in astonishment, "if it ain't just Tacy Ann!"

Jeff, in his turn, uttered an exclamation of surprise and loosened his grasp. Tacy Ann sank, whimpering, against the oaken table.

"I have been a-knockin' and a-knockin' an' a-callin' for you, Moonshine, all night long," she sobbed.

Moonshine bent over her and impulsively placed an arm about her shoulders. Tacy Ann, still sobbing, raised her face.

"You wouldn't get up and let me in," she complained.

Jeff sat staring at her curiously. "What're you doin' out so late, Tacy Ann?" he asked. "It's long past the middle of the night. You should be home in bed."

Tacy Ann broke into a torrent of weeping on Moonshine's shoulder.

"I hain't got no bed," she wailed; "an' I hain't got no home—no more."

Moonshine's straight young body, strong as it was, was beginning to bend under the strain. Jeff caught Tacy Ann firmly about the waist, half dragged and half carried her across the room, and seated her in the big chair.

"What's the matter with you, Tacy Ann?" he said sharply. "You hain't been drinkin' and you don't act crazy—what's the trouble?"

She burst into a fresh paroxysm of weeping. "I tell you," she cried, "I cain't go home no more. Aunt Tildy Moberly—she locked me out—she locked me out for good."

Jeff pondered heavily over this answer. "What for did yo' Aunt Tildy

lock you out? We want to take you in, Moonshine an' me. You're cast off, so you say—we want to know the reason. Now, tell us why?"

Like an animal at bay, Tacy Ann sprang to her feet, and with blazing eyes faced Jeff Parlomon.

"I kin tell you why," she shrieked. "I kin tell you jes' what my Aunt Tildy said; and, if you don't believe me, you kin go and ask her. She said as how there was too much talk about me and Harney Leveridge."

Jeff started. "Seems to me," he murmured, as though speaking to himself, "I've heard some talk of that sort."

His face hardened, his eyes grew stern. Moonshine noted this sudden change in Jeff. She placed a comforting hand on Tacy Ann's shoulder and faced her father.

"It ain't true, pap," she exclaimed, with a ring of conviction in her voice. "If that's the reason why Tacy Ann was cast off, I can tell you now it ain't true."

"How do you know?" queried Jeff doubtfully.

Moonshine pressed one hand against her breast. Nestling against her heart was Harney's love letter.

"I know—that's all," she said.

Jeff's gaze wandered from the steady eyes of Moonshine to the forlorn figure of Tacy Ann.

"You've got to be mighty keerful, Moonshine," he protested; "an' I have got to be mighty keerful for you. Thar has been some talk—some talk that has reached my ears. I don't know what to say."

"I do," responded Moonshine, almost defiantly. A sense of primitive justice came to her aid. "Let them prove their talk. We have got no call to judge Tacy Ann"—her voice was tremulous for an instant—"nor Harney Leveridge without there's proof. Tacy Ann Jarrett's got a right to stay in this house until they prove their talk. I tell you, pap, she's got to stay."

"If you say so, Moonshine," faltered Jeff. But he shook his head still doubtfully.

Moonshine caught him by the arm.

"What would you do, pap?" she exclaimed. "Turn her out on the mountain to die? She's got to have a home, and she's got to have friends. There ain't anybody can get along without friends. Tacy Ann, you'll stay—and welcome."

Tacy Ann stayed, and Moonshine was as good as her word. She made her welcome. Jeff Parlomon, ever fearful of his daughter's good name—the women of the mountain had but little else to boast of, and a good name was an attribute to which they clung in frenzied terror—withheld both his welcome and his judgment.

In the morning he rode over to Aunt Tildy Moberly's; but, even after a lengthy talk with that irascible old woman, who had no proof of Tacy Ann's wickedness to offer, but had simply acted upon rumors, Jeff still withheld his judgment. "Thar's jest one other thing to do," he told himself, "and then we'll see."

Halfway between Aunt Tildy's and his home, Jeff turned his horse's head into a narrow lane. Some distance down the lane he saw the man he was looking for—a tall figure approaching him with long, swinging strides.

Jeff checked his horse, dismounted, and stood waiting. He glanced silently, curiously, and a bit sternly at the other man.

"Harney," he said finally as they stood face to face, "I hain't askin' you to tell me anything that you don't want to. A man hain't got no right to make his fellow man hang himself with his own tongue. You kin answer or not as you see fit."

Harney, with his heart thumping against his ribs, felt the blood slowly creeping into his face. He fumbled a moment with his belt to hide his confusion.

"You kin go on, Jeff."

"Harney, thar's only one question that I wanted to ask. Have you been makin' love to any young gal not a hundred miles from heah?"

Harney looked half defiantly, squarely into Jeff's eyes. "Then she told you so herself?" he queried.

Jeff started. Then he frowned. "You admit it?" he said.

Harney flushed again. He thought of the telltale letter asking a young lady to name the day.

"I might have been a bit too free, Jeff," he admitted. "But don't hold it agin' me, Jeff."

"I hain't holdin' nothin' agin' you, Harney," went on Jeff, though it was clear from his contracted brows that a stern rebuke was upon his lips. "I'm only holdin' it agin' her."

"Agin' her!" echoed Harney. "Don't you do it, Jeff. No matter what has happened, it's all my doin'. You cain't hold nothin' agin' her, Jeff Parlamon."

Jeff Parlamon turned on his heel and swung himself into the saddle.

"It's my business, Harney," he exclaimed, in a tone that admitted of no further parley, "whether I hold anything agin' her or whether I don't."

Jeff went back to Moonshine with a heavy heart. He had a duty to perform, and he must perform it.

"Whar's Tacy Ann?" he whispered to his daughter.

"Sh-h-h!" answered Moonshine. "She's wore out, pap. I made her take a nap. She's upstairs sleeping like a baby on my bed."

"Honey, we have got to turn her out."

Moonshine shook her head. "Did you get the proof?" she asked.

"I got proof enough for me," returned Jeff Parlamon.

"Tell me," she said defiantly, "what proof did you get?"

Jeff shook his head. Not for one instant would he have betrayed the confidence that Harney Leveridge reposed in him. That was proof of such nature that he could not divulge it to his daughter.

"I got proof enough for me, honey," he returned. "You must take my word for that."

Moonshine folded her arms. "Pap," she said, "since you have been gone I have been thinking it over, and I made up my mind just what to do; and I'm going to do it, pap, proof or no proof.

I don't care what Tacy Ann has done or what she has not done. She's a friend of mine, and I've got to be a friend of hers. She's going to stay here, pap."

"No!" thundered Jeff.

Moonshine stood her ground. "If what you say is true," she went on, "then now is the time that Tacy Ann most needs friends—now is the time she cain't be left alone. Either she's got to stay with me, or else I have got to go along with her. You have got to take your choice, pap—which shall it be?"

Tacy Ann stayed on. Moonshine meant what she had said; and in any event, in any circumstances, it was clear that she would have welcomed Tacy Ann. Not once, however, did Moonshine's faith in the girl's innocence falter; and that faith was peculiarly responsible for the thing that followed—that faith, built up not upon Tacy Ann, but upon the logical circumstances of the case. Aunt Tildy Moberly had named the cause of her expulsion—Harney Leveridge. No other cause had presented itself, and Moonshine knew that Aunt Tildy was wrong, because not for one instant could she doubt Harney Leveridge. It was her faith in Harney, if the truth be told, rather than her faith in Tacy Ann that justified her belief in the girl's innocence.

And so it came about that with her sense of primitive justice strong within her, even though the news of Tacy Ann's expulsion from Aunt Tildy's had traveled about Crooked Run like wildfire, Moonshine openly, defiantly, and a bit imprudently, perhaps, took up the cause of Tacy Ann's innocence, and girded herself as for a pitched battle. In her right hand, so she told herself, she held the sword of truth.

The crisis arose on the opening day of school. On the morning of that day the two girls started off, Moonshine a bit too jauntily, perhaps, and Tacy Ann a bit shamefacedly, side by side together. Jeff saw them start, and called Moonshine back.

"Honey," he exclaimed, "what are you goin' to do with Tacy Ann?"

"Tacy Ann's going to school," responded Moonshine.

Jeff shook his head. "She cain't go to school, I tell you."

"Pap," protested his daughter, "she has just naturally got to go to school. It's school that teaches folks like Tacy Ann to be good. If she don't learn what's to become of her, pap? She's got to go to school."

Jeff had not foreseen this complication. He had given way to Moonshine latterly, and with good reason. He recalled, in the brief career of Moonshine's mother, periods of high-strung, nervous tension and excitement like to these. The recollection made him doubly careful, unusually considerate now.

Moonshine went her way with Tacy Ann. They were, of course, two hours too early; but so was everybody else.

As they neared the schoolhouse, there were wafted to them on the early-morning breeze the strident, angry tones of the schoolmaster, Welch Honaker.

Moonshine caught Tacy Ann by the arm.

"We had better hurry," she exclaimed. "Welch Honaker is mad about the new school-teacher. I wouldn't miss it for a good deal, so come along."

The schoolhouse was filled to overflowing when they reached it. Crooked Run had had the news for weeks—the news of the advent of a new schoolmaster. Crooked Run was out in force—in all sizes and a variety of color, all the way from little Tad Marlinton, aged five, to Romney Enders, twenty-seven if a day, the oldest pupil and the biggest dunce in Crooked Run.

Stacked in a corner were a multitude of rifles; although here and there an eager-eyed pupil still held his clutch upon his gun. So intent was the crowd upon Welch Honaker that none noticed the advent of the two girls.

Tacy Ann cast a despairing glance toward the rear of the overcrowded schoolroom; but Moonshine's swift glance had detected two seats immediately under Welch Honaker's nose. With a swift movement, she caught

Tacy Ann's arm and forced her swiftly to the front. In a moment they were seated side by side.

Above them Welch Honaker, red of eye and redolent of alcohol, swung and swayed, working himself into a furor.

"I tell yer," he cried, "possession is nine-tenths of the law. Don't talk to me of yo' fancy new professors. I tell yer he hain't even yere. What good is yo' fancy professor if he don't show up on time? I tell yer there hain't only so much education on this earth but what there is. I tell yer that Welch Honaker has got it, and you know he has. Cast yo' eyes upon them there six books—them there volumes on the shelf. Welch Honaker kin read them all—he knows them all from A to iz-zard. Is there ary man in Crooked Run kin say as much? Is there ary man in Ellenbogen or in Red Oak? You know there hain't." He held his hand high in the air and brought it down with a crash upon his desk. "What I wants to know," he bellowed vociferously, "what I wants to know is just this—are you for me or are you agin' me? Come!"

There was no answer, and there was a reason why. Welch's voice had drowned out a sullen murmur that had had its birth in whispers, but a moment before, that had risen now to the dignity of a shrill-voiced, angry protest. This was directed in no sense at Welch Honaker. Up to this time his eloquence had had its natural effect—the school was with him. But whereas hitherto he had held the center of the stage, the attention first had become divided, and then had diverted itself wholly from Welch Honaker and concentrated upon another object.

There were cries of "Shame!" There were cries of "Put her out!" In the midst of it, Mul Byington, a mature young giant of nineteen, deserted his desk on the boys' side of the aisle and grabbed his seventeen-year-old sister by the arm.

"Yer'll come out er this, Ruby," he exclaimed in raucous tones. "Yer cain't stay heah, I tell yer. Yer'll come with me."

Being the originator of a brilliant

movement, he had imitators. No sooner had Mul Byington and his shrieking sister disappeared from the schoolroom than every brother followed suit.

Welch Honaker, alarmed, left his platform, forced his way brutally through the crowd, and filled the door with his huge bulk.

"What's got into you?" he cried. "Have you gone mad? Come back or I'll make you come back—sit down or I'll make you sit down. Order! D'ye understand?"

At his bellow of command the incipient riot was quelled. The disorderly crowd slumped back indiscriminately into their seats.

"What's got into you?" demanded Welch Honaker. "Have you turned agin' me—are you for me or agin' me? Tell me that."

Sid Harkness, from his corner, leaped upon a desk and drew his lanky form to its full height.

"Welch Honaker," he cried, almost mimicking the bellow of the schoolmaster, but speaking as one who has authority, "Welch Honaker, be yer ther schoolmaster or be yer not?"

"I be," said Honaker.

The long arm of Sid Harkness stretched itself to its full length. His lean forefinger pointed in the direction of the platform.

"If yer air ther schoolmaster, Welch Honaker, and if yer knows more than ary one of us, yer had better tell us this—what is she doin' yere—what is Tacy Ann Jarrett a-doin' in this yere school?"

Sid Harkness leaped to the ground without waiting for an answer. He had made his point. The result was immediate. Half a hundred angry voices snarled across the schoolroom, with Welch Honaker as their target. The cries of "Put her out!" beat upon his ears like a cannonade.

Honaker, bewildered at first, became suddenly complacent. He had thought at first that the universal dissatisfaction had been directed against himself. Now he saw the thing in its true light. The people who had talked had talked to some purpose. He began to under-

stand—but the first essential was to restore order.

He held up both hands and raised his bellowing voice to its loudest pitch. His method was successful. In an instant he had stilled the pandemonium—in an instant order had been restored. This was due, perhaps, to curiosity as much as to anything else.

"Stop yo' jawin'," cried Sid Harkness through the din. "Let's see what Welch Honaker is gwine ter do."

Welch Honaker swung his arms in the air. "You'll take yo' seats," he said.

Meekly the school subsided. Welch threw into his belligerent glance all the bullying and browbeating that lay within his power. Then he resumed his station on the platform. For the first time he showed signs of inward trepidation. He drew his hand twice across his mouth before he spoke again.

"Tacy Ann Jarrett," he said at length, with his eyes on the rear wall, "I'm schoolmaster yere, and you'll have to go."

Tacy Ann had been cowering in her seat all during the hubbub, her face covered with her hands. Now, at the sound of Welch's voice, she drew her hands away and stared at him in undisguised astonishment.

Moonshine had risen, and stood facing Welch Honaker with blazing eyes.

"Tacy Ann stays here with me," she declared.

Once more the shrill voices broke into a storm of protest. Once more Welch Honaker stilled it with a wave of his hand.

"Tacy Ann Jarrett, you will leave the school," he said.

Tacy Ann, with a choking cry, staggered to her feet. Moonshine restrained her for an instant with a touch upon her arm.

"Welch Honaker," said Moonshine, "there's nothing against Tacy Ann Jarrett but a lot of talk. There's nobody can prove anything against her. If there's anybody knows anything against her, let him prove it now. Do you hear me?—let him prove it now, or let him hold his peace."

The challenge was followed by a mo-

ment's silence—the silence was followed by renewed murmuring.

"Tacy Ann Jarrett," repeated Welch Honaker, "you're expelled from this school. D'you heah me?—go!"

Tacy Ann turned blindly toward the exit.

Moonshine turned with her. "Tacy Ann," she said, "I tell you to stay."

"If she stays," cried Sid Harkness, "ther rest of us goes."

"Put her out!" screamed little Tad Marlinton in childish glee at the rumpus.

"I'm going," whimpered Tacy Ann, placing her arm above her head as though to ward off blows, "I'm going, only give me time."

Moonshine stepped to her side. "I'm going with you, Tacy Ann," she said.

Side by side they passed up the narrow aisle and reached the doorway. But here their path was blocked—blocked very formidably, but very successfully.

A young broad-shouldered individual stood squarely in the doorway, a bit wide-legged, to prevent all egress. Behind him in the narrow lane was his well-groomed mount tied to a tree. The man in the doorway wore a gray shirt and a pair of pull boots, with his trousers, a bit the worse for wear, tucked into the tops. Across his left arm was flung his rifle. He glanced with some amusement into the eyes of Moonshine Parlomon, and then started, as though fascinated by the sheer beauty of the girl.

"Playing hooky so early in the day?" he queried. He drew forth a nickel-plated watch. "School is not over, surely? It's hardly time for it to begin."

Tacy Ann tried to push past him. "We've got to go," she choked, for the jeers and hisses at her back burned into her very soul.

The stranger heard them and looked wonderingly at Moonshine. "You are pupils in this school," he asked, "are you not?"

"Yes," answered Moonshine defiantly, "we are."

The stranger bowed. "Then come back in," he said, pressing his way to

the fore and gently forcing Moonshine and her charge before him. "I am the new schoolmaster here, and I wish you all good day."

Moonshine, with Tacy Ann at her side, resumed her seat. There was silence, sudden, ominous. The new teacher nodded curtly but politely to Welch Honaker and strode lightly to the platform. He held out his hand.

"You are Mr. Welch Honaker," he said, looking Welch in the eye, "the former schoolmaster. My name is Savage—Mr. Richard Savage. I am the new man. I suppose there's no objection to my starting in at once."

Welch heavily stood his ground. His brow hung low over his eyes. He thrust out his heavy chin.

"Stranger," said Welch, "I *was* the school-teacher, and I *am* the school-teacher, and I'm *goin' ter be* the school-teacher. Possession is nine-tenths of the law. There hain't no committees, no counties, nor States, nor governments kin interfere with me. This yere's Crooked Run, and I'm the schoolmaster of Crooked Run, and I'm runnin' this yere school. Stranger, there's the door."

The man named Savage nodded easily. He thrust his hand into his breast pocket.

"Fortunately for me, Mr. Honaker," he said, "here are my credentials. Show me yours."

He produced before the eyes of the school, and thrust under the nose of Welch Honaker, a partly printed, partly written document.

Honaker glanced at it for one instant, his anger rising as he looked.

"We're with yer, Welch," cried Sid Harkness from his corner.

Thus encouraged, Welch snatched the other man's credentials from his hand, tore them savagely across, crushed them into a crinkled mass, and cast them on the floor.

The newcomer stooped to pick up the pieces. That movement gave Welch his advantage. With a ferocious lunge of his huge body and a mighty swing of his right arm, he aimed with all his brute strength toward the stranger's head.

The blow, had it struck, would have been sufficient to dislocate the neck of any ordinary man. But it did not land. Instead, something else happened. The stranger merely twitched himself aside, and Welch Honaker, impelled by the force of his own momentum, plunged headlong from the platform to the floor beneath.

He lay there for an instant, stunned. Mr. Richard Savage, the new man, took advantage of that instant. He tapped sharply, insistently on his desk.

"The school will come to order," he exclaimed, looking at his watch.

The school did not come to order.

"We're with yer, Welch," rang out the clarion voice of Sid Harkness once again.

As one man, the school surged forward to the corner where the guns were stacked; then, bristling with weapons, they surged about the teacher's desk. The teacher was quite as active. He lifted up his own gun from the desk upon which he had laid it, and, with a sudden, skillful movement, flung it through the open window of the school.

He turned his back upon the threatenings of Welch Honaker. He looked not at the muzzles of the guns that threatened him, but looked steadily, one by one, into the eyes behind the guns.

"The school will come to order," repeated Mr. Richard Savage.

Sullenly, slowly, but certainly and surely, the school came to order. For once the school at Crooked Run had met its master—the pupils sank meekly into seats.

Their eyes were upon Mr. Richard Savage. That gentleman's back was still turned to Welch Honaker. Mr. Richard Savage had picked Welch Honaker for a bully and a coward; but there was something that he did not know about Welch Honaker—something in Welch Honaker's nature that had lain dormant for years.

Moonshine rose in her seat, uttered an exclamation of horror, and rushed toward Welch. Welch, in his anger, had raised a rifle and was about to shoot.

"Welch!" cried a stentorian voice from the door beyond.

Welch turned and looked. In the doorway stood Jeff Parlamon. The sight of Jeff cowed Honaker. The life went out of him, but not the sullenness. Growling, he dropped the rifle and strode toward the door. Halfway there he was halted.

"Honaker," called the new schoolmaster.

Welch, with a snarl, turned and half faced him.

"Honaker," said the new man, "I'll have it out with you anywhere and anyhow you please. But I want to warn the rest of you," he went on, "that the man who would shoot another in the back will burn schoolhouses and dwellings. He will steal. He will wrong women. There's no limit to the wickedness of a man who would shoot another in the back."

Jeff Parlamon held up his hand. "It's all right, Mr. School-teacher," he said soothingly. "Welch is a mighty nice man. He got kind o' angry, and I hain't blamin' him. Never mind, Welch," he said, drawing the ex-schoolmaster from the schoolhouse, "thar's somethin' that I got to say to you that'll make everything come square."

What magic words Jeff Parlamon whispered into the ear of Welch Honaker that day in the narrow lane leading from the schoolhouse none ever knew. Certain it is, however, that they were hypnotic in their effect. Certain it is that Welch listened; at first incredulously, then eagerly—then finally clutched Jeff Parlamon's hand with his own.

"Jeff," he cried at length, "we'll call it square. Don't say another word. We'll call it square."

CHAPTER VIII.

That very evening, Mr. Richard Savage, the new schoolmaster, sat ensconced in one of Aunt Tildy Moberly's two rooms.

Interior space at Crooked Run was at a premium; and, of the five possible boarding places that had been offered

to him, the school-teacher had selected hers. Hers was the one offer that enabled him to have some kind of privacy for at least some part of the time.

The schoolmaster sat, with pen in hand, facing Aunt Tildy. He had so devised and so adjusted a cardboard shade upon the lamp that, while his face remained in darkness, there was a strong light cast not alone upon the work that he was doing, but also upon the strong lineaments of Aunt Tildy's face.

"Yer come by ther way of Red Oak?" ventured Aunt Tildy, taking down her pipe from the mantelpiece.

"I did," answered the schoolmaster as he wrote.

"I heern tell," went on Aunt Tildy, "thet thar's a new tavern down ter Red Oak."

"There is," answered the schoolmaster, glancing at her casually. "I put up there for a week."

Aunt Tildy stared at him. She wondered vaguely whether a man who had spent a week's board at the new tavern in Red Oak could possibly be good for his board and lodging in Crooked Run —on the principle that you can't throw your money out of the window and have the house full of it at the same time. She leaned forward as she cleaned her pipe.

"What did yer hev ter pay?" she queried in a hoarse whisper.

"Four dollars a week," answered the schoolmaster carelessly.

Aunt Tildy's eyes bulged: "Fo' dollars a week!" she cried sharply. "You're jokin'. Why, thar hain't any man livin' kin live up fo' dollars a week."

The schoolmaster smiled. "I just felt like dissipating, Mrs. Moberly, before I started in up here—and so I dissipated at Red Oak."

He thrust his hand in his pocket and drew forth a tin box, and opened it; then he placed it on the table directly under Aunt Tildy's nose. Aunt Tildy raised it to a position of closer proximity with that prominent organ, and sniffed with the air of a connoisseur.

"Good terbaccer thet," she said.

"Try it," he answered. "Fill your pipe with it."

"Plenty er time, plenty er time," she answered. "I got ter sense it first." A flash of appreciation shone in her eyes. "Hain't never smelt sich powerful good terbaccer," she exclaimed.

The schoolmaster nodded. "The best there is," he answered.

Aunt Tildy sprang to her feet and clutched him across the table with one of her claws.

"It hain't Havanner?" she cried excitedly.

"Just what it is," he answered. "It's the best pipe tobacco in the world."

Aunt Tildy sank limply back into her seat, alternately sniffing and staring at the contents of the box.

"Havanner terbaccer," she repeated in tremulous tones; "an' ter think er Tildy. Moberly er smokin' genwine Havanner terbaccer. Stranger," she went on gratefully, "I alluz said give me a pipeful er Havanner terbaccer before I die, an' I'll die happy."

"Fill your pipe," he commented.

She did so carefully, yet eagerly, and lit it. In the ecstasy that followed she was silent, and the school-teacher went on with his work. Finally he drew toward him a pile of slender, paper-covered books.

"What air them thar?" asked Aunt Tildy Moberly.

The schoolmaster consulted a list of names at his side, seized one of the slender books, and wrote a name upon the cover. The name on the cover corresponded with the first name on the list. That name was Moonshine Parlagon.

"These are copy books," he answered.

With his face still in the shadow, he fixed his glance on Aunt Tildy's face as he handed her the copy book with the name of Moonshine Parlagon upon it.

"That's the way I spell my name, Mrs. Moberly," he said, scrutinizing her carefully.

She took the copy book and glanced at the name of Moonshine Parlagon. Her glance was dull and uncomprehending. Not once was there a flash of intelligence in it as she looked.

"Hifalutin' writin'," she admitted, poring over it stupidly.

The teacher nodded. "You can't write, can you, Mrs. Moberly?" he asked.

"Nary," she replied. "Got no use fer it. I'm a Presbyterian."

Upon the second copy book he wrote hastily another name—the name of Tacy Ann Jarrett. He thrust this book under her nose.

"That's Mul Byington's book," he ventured.

She nodded appreciatively. "Mul hain't never had his name writ so fancy afore," she said.

The schoolmaster smiled. "Can you read, Aunt Tildy?" he queried, still with his glance fastened on her face.

"Nope," replied Aunt Tildy briskly. "Hain't got no bad habits. I'm a Presbyterian."

The school-teacher leaned back, satisfied. He felt more than ever that Aunt Tildy Moberly's was the place for him. He had many reasons for seeking privacy—for evading and avoiding prying eyes; but so long as those eyes were the eyes of a Presbyterian, whose faith had kept her from bad habits, he was satisfied.

Lighting his own pipe, he settled down for a comfortable evening. The sighing of the wind without gave him the opening he was looking for.

"Sounds like a ghost," he said.

"Yer mean a ha'nt?" she queried.

"Yes," he answered.

"Don't only *sound* like one," went on Aunt Tildy; "it *is* one fer sure."

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Huh?" returned Aunt Tildy. "How do I know?—'cause I hev heern them, and I have seed them. Snake Hill's full er them."

"Where is Snake Hill?" he asked.

Aunt Tildy's pipestem pointed down the road. "Snake Hill," she said, "lies across the ways from Parlamon's."

The schoolmaster was still puzzled. "Why do they call it Snake Hill?" he queried.

"Because," she answered, "it's full er snakes—it's as full er snakes as it's full er underbrush. Nobody durst go hunt-

in' on Snake Hill, not day or night. It's full er snakes by day an' full er ha'nts by night. I'm afeared of it myself."

The schoolmaster became very grave. "You have no need to be afraid," he answered as seriously as the occasion would permit. "If a ghost met you on a dark night, Mrs. Moberly, I swear he would cut and run."

"Mebbe he would," assented Aunt Tildy. "Most er ther time I'm moughty brave, but I don't hanker after ha'nts."

"Nor snakes," he suggested.

"Well," she mused, "yer kin cure a snake bite with er morsel of white licker; but if a ha'nt sh'd bite yer, that's no tellin'."

Convinced that Aunt Tildy was one of the oldest inhabitants, the schoolmaster led her easily and naturally into pleasant and instructive paths. By midnight he had drained her dry—she had taught him the history, the topography, and the geography of Crooked Run.

Out of the evening's instruction he had gleaned two significant facts. The first was that Snake Hill was the only locality of which Crooked Run felt any fear; the second was that, in all of Aunt Tildy's loquaciousness, not once had she mentioned the existence of an illicit still.

Next morning the schoolmaster was up at daybreak. He dressed himself hastily and crept noiselessly into the open air. Then, with his head somewhat ostentatiously erect, his shoulders thrown back, and his chest thrown out, he strode vigorously down the road in the direction of Snake Hill.

Here and there were signs of life. In front of a broken-down shanty little Tad Marlinton, half dressed, was playing in the road. The teacher stopped for a few brief moments, and showed the little rascal a brand-new way of snaring rabbits. Then he passed on.

He had not proceeded fifty yards farther, however, before he sank, somewhat hastily and with apparent fatigue, upon a boulder at the roadside. Although at this juncture he was in full view of little Tad Marlinton, he was protected on the other side by a bit of foliage from the view of wayfarers

traveling on the opposite end of the road.

Apparently resting, Mr. Richard Savage was, in fact, alert. From where he sat, and without being seen, his vision traveled past Jeff Parlamon's, and perhaps half a mile farther down the road, for which distance the road was straight.

The instant before he had dropped upon his bowlder he had seen something that gave him pause.

Out of Jeff Parlamon's barnyard rode two mounted figures, picking their way carefully along the side of the highway—the figure of a man and the figure of a woman. For a quarter of a mile, perhaps, they cantered steadily, the one behind the other, down the road. Then they drew up their mounts and halted, and glanced about them with expectancy.

They had not long to wait. Out of some narrow lane there charged down upon them suddenly a third horseman, whose mount was as burly and as clumsy as himself. Apparently without a word, he took his position at the head of the other riders, and together, single file, the cavalcade passed on.

Mr. Savage's eyes behind his bit of foliage narrowed as he watched them.

"To Ellenbogen," he mused; "and what for? Why do they go—all three—to Ellenbogen?"

The three knew why they went. There was much method in this early-morning journey. Ever since a moonlit night some weeks before there had been ringing in the ears of Jeff Parlamon an agonized entreaty: "You got to quit the still." Ever since that moonlit night—when she had found out a few more things than she had intended to—Moonshine Parlamon had dinned this entreaty—it had risen almost to the dignity of a command—into her father's ears. What instinct impelled her to it she did not know. It was instinct, and instinct alone, that guided this girl of the mountains. It was her unerring instinct that had rebelled at the ignorance of Welch Honaker at a time when she could not reason out what ignorance really meant. It was instinct that

made her realize the difference between these people of the sky line and the rest of the world that lay beyond. It was her unerring instinct that she blindly followed now.

But it was not her spoken entreaty that Jeff Parlamon had listened to. He had tried to shut out from his mental vision the picture of the wild thing that danced and sang with such abandon in the rays of the moon that night—and in vain. Night after night he had wakened suddenly from a dream—had dreamed once more that he was climbing the stairs, clasping her over his shoulder, with her hot young breath upon his neck.

"Not ag'in, honey——"

He would wake with the words upon his lips. Night after night, waking thus, he would steal into her bedroom and bend gently over her, wondering. Then he would creep back, satisfied. But the fear was ever with him. He felt, somehow, that the fear was on her, too; and as she had been impelled by her instinct, so Jeff found himself yielding to his own. And this was the consummation of it all—this early-morning ride toward Ellenbogen.

After the cavalcade had proceeded for perhaps three-quarters of a mile, and after it had turned a bend in the road beyond the vision of Mr. Richard Savage, the leader of the three held up his hand and halted. The other two drew in their mounts on either side of him. Welch Honaker stretched his arm toward a tree at the roadside.

"As you well know, Jeff," he said, "my line starts yere."

Jeff nodded. "And runs to the little creek," remarked Jeff, "and follers the little creek to the oak tree over yon, and then back to the road farther down a piece."

"Right, Jeff," answered Welch Honaker; "and there hain't no better corn land in the State. Yours hain't no better, Jeff."

Jeff smiled grimly. "Mebbe," he returned, "mine hain't so good, Welch. My corn land oughter be mighty blamed tired—I keep it workin' all the time; while as for you, Welch, you don't be-

lieve in workin' your land any more'n you believe in workin' yourself."

Welch grunted good-naturedly. "Don't pick now, Jeff," he cried; "don't pick."

"You got yo' title deeds?" asked Jeff cautiously.

"I sure have," answered Welch.

"Then," said Jeff, "let's mosey along. We'll catch the squire by breakfast time, mabbe."

The squire was not only a squire, to wit, a justice of the peace, but something else beside—he was a cobbler, and the only one in Ellenbogen. His shoemaker's bench became at times an altar; at times the bar of justice.

He had breakfasted when they arrived, and was hammering new shaping leather with dull thuds upon a last.

A little hunched-up man was Squire Penrod, and he wore huge glasses, behind which shone a pair of cunning eyes. Across his bench there lay his rifle, and above his head, behind him on the wall, hung a hemp rope twisted into a sinister loop, and a pair of handcuffs—grim warning to the evildoer.

The squire looked from Jeff to Honaker, and then his glance rested finally on Moonshine. He picked up a black book that lay at his side.

"Pretty early in the mornin' for a weddin'," he remarked. "Is that what you-all want?"

"Yes," said Welch Honaker impudently, drawing Moonshine's arm forcibly through his.

Moonshine jerked her arm away and withdrew into a corner.

"Weddin'!" she cried disdainfully. "I wouldn't marry Welch Honaker if he was the last man on earth."

Jeff Parlomon drew forth some papers from his pocket. "Nary weddin', squire," he commented; "it's jest a bit o' law writin' that we've come for ye to do. I want to sell to Welch, and Welch wants to sell to me."

"Any money passin'?" asked the squire.

Welch shook his head. "Only a fair exchange. You know Jeff Parlomon's Snake Hill, don't you?"

"I know thar is sech a place," said the

squire, without, however, any sign of interest.

"And," went on Welch, "you know my homestead and my corn land?"

The squire nodded. "Know that beter'n Snake Hill."

"Well," interrupted Jeff, "Welch Honaker's deedin' me his homestead and his corn land, and I'm deedin' him Snake Hill."

The squire scratched his head. He looked long and earnestly at Jeff Parlomon, and then long and earnestly at Welch Honaker. There was something about the deal that he could not reconcile.

"No money passin'?" he asked again.

They shook their heads. The justice turned his countenance sharply to the right. In that position his right eye could be seen by Welch Honaker alone, and not by Jeff or Moonshine. The justice waited until he held Welch Honaker's glance. Then slowly the lid of that right eye drooped and fell.

"Got to get some blanks inside the house," said the squire at length.

He rose and passed from the shop into a narrow passageway that led into another room. Welch waited for a moment, and then carelessly sauntered after him. When he reached another doorway, the hand of Squire Penrod shot into the passage and drew him into a larger room. The squire noiselessly shut the door.

"Welch," he whispered, "I like you first rate, and that is why I summoned you inside. You must be a crazy man to do a thing like this."

Welch stared at the squire. "What do you mean?" he gasped.

"Mean?" echoed the squire. "I mean that you're bein' swindled. Jeff Parlomon is a-bamboozlin' of yer. You've got a right good farm, and what air you gettin' for it? Snake Hill hain't worth quarter what your farm is, Welch."

Jeff broke into a relieved smile. "Oh, that's the point, squire!" he chuckled.

It was clear that as yet the squire did not know the peculiar value of Snake Hill. Its peculiar value was a feature that could not appear safely on the surface of a deed.

"You're bein' done, Welch," persisted Squire Penrod.

"Never you mind, squire," returned Welch easily. "This is a friendly deal." He, too, indulged himself in a wink. "You see, it's all sort of in the family, squire. It won't be long, mebbe, afore I'm a son-in-law of Jeff's."

This new light upon the subject satisfied the squire.

"Didn't want to see you get trimmed, that's all," he whispered as he led Welch back.

At the end of an hour the squire laid down his pen with a weary sigh.

"Done, and done all shipshape," he exclaimed; "signed, and sealed, and delivered. Day after to-morrow I'm ridin' over to the co'thouse; and I'll put this yere on record if you say so."

Jeff held out his hand in farewell. "We say so, squire," he answered, "and much obliged to you. Comin', Welch?"

Welch grinned sheepishly and shook his head. "Not just yet," he answered. "It hain't every day I get down to Ellenbogen. You kin mosey along. I'll be comin' later."

Jeff drew him out of the little shop into the street.

"Welch," he said earnestly, "all I want is your good will and your good-fellowship. I'm a square man, and I alluz told you I would treat you square. Now that you've got the still—now that you're goin' to be a rich man, Welch, I want you to tell us somethin', me and Moonshine—does yer hold anything agin' us for the way we acted about the school?"

Welch did not look at Moonshine; he merely looked at Jeff. "I hold nothin' agin' you, Jeff; nothin' at all. I must say I am more'n satisfied."

"Then come along," said Jeff to Moonshine. And they went.

Welch watched them go; then he stole once more into the shop.

"Squire," he said, "on second thoughts, I do not think I'll have this yere deed recorded—this yere deed of Jeff's to me. Seems to me it hain't worth the trouble nor expense."

"It oughter be recorded, Welch," returned the squire. "It's notice to the

world. If you don't record it, and if Jeff sh'd make another deed of this yere Snake Hill, your deed would be no good."

Welch seized his deed and placed it in his pocket. "I kin trust Jeff Parlamon," he said magnanimously, "not to make no other deed; and I don't see no sense in puttin' this on record. I'd ruther save the fees."

The squire still shook his head. "The world won't have no notice that you've bought and own it," he protested.

"The world," said Welch, "will have to get along without the notice. That's all, squire, and good day."

At dusk that evening he was back in Crooked Run; but he was bound, apparently, neither for the homestead with which he had just parted nor for Snake Hill. He made his way to Parlamon's.

"Lookin' for Harney Leveridge, Jeff," he said to Parlamon as he thrust his head and shoulders through the window.

"No," cried Moonshine, with some anxiety, "you don't need Harney Leveridge any more. He only helped pap. You can get somebody else, Welch Honaker."

"No matter what I want him for," persisted Welch, "I'm lookin' for him, and that's all."

"He was hobnobbin' with the school-teacher after school," said Jeff. "Thick as two peas they seem. I saw him shootin' at a target with Harney's gun; but Harney's got the teacher skinned to death."

"All right," muttered Welch. "If you see Harney, tell him to meet me at the same old place."

He left the window and strode away. Almost immediately he disappeared. Jeff strode heavily after him, and laid one hand upon his shoulder as Welch was starting to clamber down the well.

"It won't do, Welch," he said. "You're trespassin'."

"What d'you mean?" gasped Welch.

"Just what I say," answered Jeff. "I hain't employin' you no more. You're welcome as a visitor—right welcome, Welch—but you cain't use the gallery no more. Over yon lies your land. This

yere is mine. You kin cut a new way, Welch, on your own land—that's plenty of secret places. You kin cut through the undergrowth across the way, and you needn't tell me or anybody else whar the place be; but you cain't use this no more, not you nor Harney Leveridge."

And to see that his mandate was carried out, Jeff sat there on the coping of the wall, a grim sentinel, until the moon was high in the heavens. He was waiting until the advent of Harney Leveridge to warn him, too. Finally he went back to the house.

"Don't know whar Harney Leveridge kin be," he said to Moonshine.

Moonshine nodded. "Harney was here for just a minute or so," she answered. "Just came in and asked for Welch, and I warned him about the well. And," she added, "I warned him about Welch—about Welch and the still—and he promised me"—her voice trembled now—"he promised me just like you promised me—he promised me he would quit, and then he went away."

Jeff picked up a lamp. "I'm wore out, Moonshine, honey; and I hain't hardly done a stroke o' work to-day. Jest wore out with gettin' rid of the blamed thing. Thar's money in it, honey; thar's good livin' and thar's comfort in it; but I'm glad to get shet of it, after all. Mebbe you're right, honey—I kinder wish yo' maw had somehow told me to quit it years ago. Guess she was afeared to, likely. Yo' maw she—"

He broke off abruptly; and, with the light before him, clambered up the stairs.

"You better come to bed, honey," he cried from the landing above, "and get yo' beauty sleep."

"I'm coming, pap," answered Moonshine, "just as soon as Tacy Ann gets back."

Jeff peered down at her from above. "Iain't Tacy Ann about?" he asked.

"Ought to be back," returned Moonshine. "She just went up the road a piece just about dark. Any minute now she's likely to be back."

Moonshine heard her father tramp into his room; and then she turned in

and tidied up things for the night. While doing this she came suddenly upon the note. It was under the window—the window in which Harney Leveridge had looked an hour before; in which he had lingered for an instant and from which he had hastened on. She knew now why he had come that night—knew that he had not sought Welch so much as he had sought her. She knew, also, why he had hastened so suddenly away.

With eager fingers she spread out the sheet of letter paper on the table and began to read. The note lacked formality completely. It had not been indited in Fifth Avenue, New York; nor was it dated eighteen hundred and sixty-four; but it was in Harney's handwriting, and signed by Harney, just as the other one had been.

"My darling," it began.

When Moonshine had read the note thus far her heart suddenly stood still. Two words had been written in after the word "darling," and had been rubbed out clumsily with an erasure. Moonshine, her face paling, pored over these two words. There was no doubt about it, the two words were Tacy Ann.

It was a long while before she could bring herself to read the rest of it; but finally she did.

Twice now, I have wrote to you. Now I want to talk to you, to kiss you on the lips, to hold you in my arms—

She read no farther. Everything seemed to blur before her eyes. Those clumsily rubbed-out words, "Tacy Ann," seared themselves into her brain. It was true, then, about Tacy Ann! He had meant none of it for her. He had meant all of it for Tacy Ann Jarrett.

Moonshine stared straight ahead of her into space. How long she sat there she did not know; but she was startled by a noise at the door. The door opened stealthily, and Tacy Ann crept in.

"I thought you'd gone to bed, Moonshine," she exclaimed.

Moonshine glanced at the clock. It was almost midnight. She leaped to her feet and thrust the letter into the folds of her dress. She was not ready yet to deliver it to Tacy Ann. Some-

thing maternal rose within her breast. She crossed to Tacy Ann and shook her by the arm.

"It's midnight, Tacy Ann," she almost screamed. "Where have you been?"

Tacy Ann drew herself up with an air of defiance that was new to her. There was a strange light in her eyes.

"It don't make any difference where I have been," she said. "I've jest been, that's all."

It was the next day that Harney Leveridge plucked up his courage and met Moonshine Parlamon face to face in the cornfield. He took hold of her hand, and laid within her palm an old-fashioned ring of gold.

"It's yours, Moonshine Parlamon," he gasped, almost beside himself with fright at the boldness of his act. "I have wrote you twice and I have had no answer. Moonshine, I jest want you to take the ring."

Moonshine stared at it a moment; and at that instant, without knowing it, she observed the details of its appearance. It was a peculiar ring, with a peculiar design upon its outer rim—a design that she afterward remembered. It was an old ring, very old—possibly an heirloom.

"I have wrote you twice," pleaded Harney.

Then Moonshine came to her senses. She turned as white as chalk—with anger this time. She lifted her hand high in the air and cast the ring with a furious swing of her arm straight into Harney's face. Then, with Harney staring after her, she fled and ran, breaking into convulsive sobs as she fled away from him.

It is a curious circumstance that the very next time she saw that ring it reposed upon the finger of Tacy Ann Jarrett. It is also a curious circumstance that she did not see Tacy Ann again until she saw the ring. Tacy Ann Jarrett had spent her last night under the roof of Jefferson Parlamon. For reasons known only to herself, Tacy Ann had slunk away at daybreak on that very morning, and she came not back that

night or any other night. She had disappeared, apparently, from off the face of the earth.

CHAPTER IX.

The man in the dilapidated buckboard slowly and painfully crawled up the long and tedious hill that began at Red Oak and ended only at Crooked Run. From time to time he would glance at the black box behind him—a mysterious, somber-colored chest that was lashed to the body of the buckboard.

The antecedent history of the rusty mule in front was indicated, to some extent, by the fact that the mule persisted in halting at every cabin clearing. The mule, evidently, was a one-time commercial traveler. The occupant of the buckboard was in nowise disturbed by these wayside stops. He took advantage of them by making polite, repeated inquiry of the cabin occupants along the road.

"Jest foller your nose till yer gits thar," most of them said.

Soberly he jogged on. As he progressed, some unexplained anxiety seemed to rest upon the man. Had the feeling been carefully analyzed—had he given vent to his innermost thoughts, he might have expressed at times a desire to be alone.

No sooner, however, had he jogged out of sight of one roadside cabin than another loomed up in the distance. The road, to him, at least, seemed all eyes and little else. Finally a patch of woods and the tortuous winding of the road through the woods gave him the opportunity he looked for.

Holding the reins between his knees and without stopping his equipage, he thrust his hand deep within his shirt, fumbled there a moment, and produced a yellow envelope. Half turning in his seat, he clutched the black box, and lifted from its body a loose and narrow plank that constituted part of its covering. Carefully he thrust the envelope into the box. The glint of metal met his eyes while doing so; but in a moment more he had dropped the loose

plank into place, and, with the aid of a hatchet in his belt, had driven home the nails.

"I reckon," he said, a bit doubtfully to himself, "that he would rather have it that way than t'other. Thar hain't no tellin' who'll be lookin' on."

An hour later, after further careful inquiry, he stopped before another cabin in and dismounted. Glancing into the western sky, he told himself that he was just about in time. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

As he approached the cabin door it opened. A gaunt female ventured from the cabin smoking a pipe.

"I reckon," remarked the driver of the buckboard, "that this yere's Mis' Tildy Moberly—that's what they told me over yon."

"I reckon you're right, young man," said Aunt Tildy; "but yer come ter ther wrong shack," she went on in disdain. "If yer 'specta Mis' Tildy Moberly ter buy—ter even look at yer geegaws or yer filigree work, so yer had best drive on."

"I hain't got nothin' to sell," replied the driver, "and I hain't lookin' for Mis' Tildy Moberly—I'm only lookin' for her house. It's Schoolmaster Savage that I want. This yere box is hisn, and I got to see him about it."

The glance of Aunt Tildy fastened itself upon the sinister-looking box lashed to the buckboard. In another instant she had dived into the cabin and had dragged forth the schoolmaster from his lair.

"You sure air the schoolmaster, hain't yer?" inquired the driver anxiously.

"Not a doubt about it," answered Savage. "What can I do for you?"

The man stepped to the buckboard, unlashed the box, and slid it gently to the ground. He pointed to a placard nailed upon the side on which appeared the schoolmaster's name and address.

"Come all the way from Louisville, this box," exclaimed the driver.

Aunt Tildy glanced at the schoolmaster. A flash of frank understanding sprang from the latter's eyes.

"Oh, to be sure," he said. "I have been waiting for it. At first, you know,

I didn't know—wait a bit, driver, and I'll help you in with it."

He seized one end of the box, and in another instant the two men had deposited their burden in the one room in Aunt Tildy's cabin devoted exclusively to the schoolmaster's use.

Aunt Tildy stood on the threshold of that room puffing excitedly upon her pipe and wondering deeply, both the driver and the schoolmaster oblivious of her presence.

"Now, let me see," mused the schoolmaster. "I wonder if I can rig this thing up by myself." He looked keenly at the driver. "Any instructions within?" he queried.

"They said so," answered the driver; "mebbe, though, you'd better look."

For one instant out of the corner of his eye he glanced at Aunt Tildy in the doorway, and then looked doubtfully at the schoolmaster. That gentleman merely nodded with assurance.

"Open her up," he said.

The driver thrust his hatchet under one of the planks and loosened it. The schoolmaster peered inside, and then thrust his hand suddenly into the depths and drew forth the yellow envelope. There were two rustling pieces of paper in it. He selected one, drew it out, and read it slowly to himself.

Instructions: H— ave all ready. Convey to level stand. Keep in a dry P— lace. Use in house and not in cornfield. Indeed if the sentiments of all are recorded, spectators will look back on a happy yesterday. Joyful also will be the survey of the past by those of Crooked Run by means of the device inclosed herewith.

When he had finished reading these apparently inane and useless instructions, he nodded his head with satisfaction.

"Very clear and very helpful," he said genially. But he did not withdraw the other crackling bit of paper from the envelope. "I think," he added to the driver, "that that is all. I understand it perfectly."

The driver shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "It may be all for you, pardner," he exclaimed; "but it hain't all for me. I've got to have

a receipt for that thar box. You'll have to make one out and sign it, d'ye see?"

"Willingly," answered Savage. He drew forth a pen and a bottle of ink and a piece of paper; then, under the curious eyes of Aunt Tildy, wrote in some haste the following missive:

Contents with instructions received in good order. Five men required to operate. Exhibition Thursday night at seven-thirty.

RICHARD SAVAGE.

The driver took it, read it over, and thrust it carelessly into his trousers pocket. Then he left the cabin, leaped into his seat, turned the rusty mule about, and headed for Red Oak. Stopping at the same bit of woods that had attracted by its loneliness before, he drew off his left boot, thrust his hand into it, and drew forth an insole. Then he drew from his trousers pocket the receipt which the schoolmaster had so carelessly prepared and signed, and placed it carefully in the bottom of his boot, replacing the insole on top of it, and once more thrusting his foot within it.

"Get up," said the driver to his mule. He sighed reminiscently. "Glad I saw that thar Mis' Tildy Moberly," he mused. "She's as pretty as a red wagon painted green."

Back in the cabin Aunt Tildy Moberly still stood in the doorway, her glance fixed in frank amazement upon the big black box. Mr. Richard Savage laughed.

"You wouldn't like to know what it is, Aunt Tildy," he queried, "would you?"

Aunt Tildy drew a long breath and glanced at him in astonishment. "I reckon I would," she said in a tone which indicated that he ought to have known without making useless inquiry. The schoolmaster, without the formality of tools, placed his strong hands upon the box and ripped off the covering planks as though they were so much pasteboard. Then gingerly and carefully he lifted out the mysterious contents, piece by piece, and set them on the floor. They were all of metal, for the most part painted black; but here

and there were sections that glittered like polished silver. Here and there was the glint of glass. The whole thing, separately or en masse, was sinister, forbidding. Not the least sinister of these parts were two heavy, tapering iron cylinders that resembled six-inch projectiles on a battleship.

Aunt Tildy's lean arm stretched itself; her lean forefinger pointed.

"Thar's a chimney," she exclaimed.

"Right you are, Aunt Tildy," conceded the schoolmaster. "What do you make of it all?"

The light of understanding spread itself slowly but surely over Aunt Tildy's countenance. Suddenly she drew herself into the room, and shut the door behind her and shot the bolt.

"Yer kin trust me," she whispered shrilly. "I won't never whisper not a word to ary soul. It's a still," she added, with the triumph of correct diagnosis in her tones. She paused, trembling. "Yer a right smart man, schoolmaster," she went on; "and they won't nobody find it out. Yer goin' ter run a still."

With a twinkle in his eye, Mr. Richard Savage placed his finger to his lips. He crossed the room, drew the bolt, and held the door wide open.

"If you leave me alone, Aunt Tildy," he whispered back to her, "I'll set it up and get it to working nicely; and then I'll let you know and show you how it works."

An instant later he had shot the bolt again. But, curiously enough, he completely ignored the conglomeration of machinery upon the floor. Instead, he sat down at his improvised desk and drew forth again the yellow envelope, and from it this time abstracted all its contents. Once more he read carefully to himself the typewritten instructions; this time half aloud.

Instructions: H— ave all ready. Convey to level stand. Keep in a dry P— lace. Use in house and not in cornfield. Indeed if the sentiments of all are recorded, spectators will look back on a happy yesterday. Joyful also will be the survey of the past by those of Crooked Run by means of the device inclosed herewith.

Three times he read them over; and

then seizing another piece of paper he wrote spasmodically as follows, selecting only parts of the typewritten directions to make up his own memoranda:

H _____ convey to _____ P _____
 _____ house and _____ cornfield
 _____ deed _____ recorded _____ yesterday.
 Survey _____ Crooked Run _____ in-
 closed herewith.

In another moment he had shaken out of its folds the other inclosure—an infinitesimal map—and pored carefully for moments over its crooked lines. Then he turned his attention to the mass of metal on the floor. It was dark when he thrust his head into Aunt Tildy's living room and beckoned to her.

"Come and see the still, Aunt Tildy," he commanded.

Trembling with eagerness, Aunt Tildy stole tiptoe into his room. She peered into the darkness.

"I cain't see," she faltered.

"You'll see in a minute," he returned.

Leaving her for an instant, he strode to a corner of the room and made a sudden movement with his right hand. There was a click—a sinister click—a sudden blinding flash of light.

Aunt Tildy stood staring straight before her for one heart-rendering instant, and then fled out of the cabin, shrieking wildly far up along the road.

The schoolmaster caught her before she had done any damage and brought her back again. He forced her into a chair and fastened the door so that she could not repeat her offense. Gradually he calmed her fears. Slowly her convulsive tremors changed to the rigidity of interested astonishment.

For a full half hour Aunt Tildy sat with gaping mouth and watched. She was still gaping when Savage touched her on the arm.

"All over, Aunt Tildy," he exclaimed. She came to with a start. "Well, Aunt Tildy," he went on, "is it a still or is it not a still?"

Aunt Tildy grunted with infinite satisfaction. "It's better'n er still," she chuckled excitedly. "I'd ruther have it than a still."

The next morning at sunrise the schoolmaster stole out of the cabin.

Under his arm he held a bunch of placards. In his right hand he held a hammer. He had a pocketful of tacks. On a tree across the way from Aunt Tildy Moberly's he neatly tacked up one of the cardboards. They read about like this:

MAGIC LANTERN LECTURE.

CROOKED RUN SCHOOLHOUSE.

VIEWS OF THE WONDERS OF THE WORLD.

NEW YORK, NIAGARA FALLS,
 SOUTH AFRICA, AND ROME.

THURSDAY EVENING AT 7:30 SHARP.

He stopped at Marlinton's and tacked up another. At the foot of Snake Hill he paused for a moment and stared upward at its impenetrable undergrowth. As he went along, he sought and found what seemed to be a newly broken trail. He strode along it for a distance, perhaps, of fifty feet, and then stopped. He heard the sound of heavy footfalls on the early-morning air. In another instant, swinging into sight along the road, came Welch Honaker.

The schoolmaster selected a placard and was tacking it to a tree when Welch came up, striding heavily and noisily through the undergrowth. The schoolmaster's manner underwent a change. Fire seemed to leap from his eyes.

"Go back to the road, Honaker," he yelled, his voice hoarse with command.

Honaker, singularly enough, obeyed. There was no anger in the words of Mr. Richard Savage, but his tones were full of offense.

"Can you see that from the road?" he queried.

"You kin see it plain," answered Welch sullenly; "but what do you want to put it in so far for?"

"Come over here," cried the schoolmaster, "and I'll tell you why."

He dropped his placards and his hammer on the ground and stripped off his coat. Suddenly he flared up—seemed beside himself.

"Honaker," he yelled stridently, "I haven't seen you since you tried to shoot me in the back. I told you I would meet you somewhere. Now I have met you. If you're a man, come on."

Welch Honaker was almost twice the size of the new schoolmaster. Actually he felt a huge contempt for the schoolmaster's physical powers. For one instant the brute leaped into his face and he lunged forward; but in the same instant all that was belligerent within him died out. He darted one swift glance toward the top of the hill—of which glance the teacher took quick note—and then cunning asserted itself.

"I hain't a-goin' to fight," said Welch Honaker slowly, falling back a pace or two.

"You're afraid," said Savage.

"Just so," answered Welch. "I'm afeared of killin' you. I hain't no fighter—not unless I'm forced to it. I'm a peaceable man, and I hain't goin' to have no blood on my hands."

The new teacher changed his tactics and his tone of voice. He no longer spoke in angry notes. In low, tense tones, just loud enough to reach the ears of Welch Honaker, he hurled insult after insult, epithet after epithet toward the man whom he had superseded. Now and then his pulses quickened, for he thought he saw that some instinct within Welch Honaker was getting the better of his caution. And he was right. But the cunning in Welch Honaker held mastery in the end.

"I hain't a-goin' to fight," muttered Welch Honaker as he slunk away. Though the blood was surging in his head, though his hands crooked and trembled like the claws of some wild beast, and though murder shone from his reddened eyes, he backed out of the thicket and proceeded up the road.

In none of this had he really played the coward. The one thought that had kept the temper of Welch Honaker in hand was this—there was a chance of his being knocked unconscious by the other man. This made no difference to him from the standpoint of a pugilist; but it did make a difference to him from the standpoint of the owner of Snake

Hill. The owner of Snake Hill had need to be alert—to have his senses well in hand.

"Better to be a coward than a fool," muttered Welch as he dropped behind a boulder to make sure that the new schoolmaster had resumed his journey on the road.

When Savage reached Parlamon's, a lithe, graceful figure darted out to meet him. This was Moonshine. Savage held his breath as he looked at her. Upon her was the early-morning beauty that sleep had stamped there. Her rough gown was open at the throat. Her white teeth flashed a smile toward him, and her eyes met his with the innocence and yet the wild-spirited expression of a fawn.

"Do you mind," said Mr. Richard Savage, "my tacking this upon your hitching post?"

"No," answered the girl; "only I wish we had a better hitching post to tack it to. Do you mind my looking at it, if you please?" She read it curiously, and then turned to him for further information. "It—it ain't anything that hurts?" she queried.

He explained to her what it was. She listened appreciatively and understandingly with wide-open eyes.

"It's a good way to teach," mused Moonshine Parlamon. "There ain't anybody that won't look at pictures. Take my pap, and even Tacy Ann—you cain't get them to read, school-teacher; and yet it seems to me they'd look at pictures for a week."

He evaded her glance for an instant. "Aunt Tildy has seen some of them," he said. "I would like to have you look at them before we show them to the rest. I want you to tell everybody about them," he went on in deliberate, incisive tones. "I want everybody in Crooked Run to be at the schoolhouse Thursday night, young and old, men and women. They will see things that they never saw before. It's a good plan—spread the news."

He did not look at her again until she spoke.

"I will sure do it," she responded. Obeying some sudden impulse, she held

out her hand and shook his. "I reckon I'm right glad to have you for a teacher," she exclaimed. Frank friendship shone from her eyes.

Savage felt the color stealing up into his face. He returned the sudden pressure of her hand.

"I have something to thank you for," he began.

"Me?" she faltered.

"You, Miss Parlamon."

She withdrew her hand and laughed a bit hysterically. "They all call me Moonshine hereabouts," she said. "You do yourself in school."

"Moonshine, then," he went on. "I understand it is you that I am to thank for my position here."

She looked confused. "Well," she admitted reluctantly, "I reckon pap and me did our best to get a good man." She flushed a bit as she went on. "And I'm sure, school-teacher," she conceded, "that we don't want any better man than you. I'm afraid," she said, shuddering a bit in spite of herself, "that Welch Honaker is holding it agin' me. Welch has got a temper. There's nobody in Crooked Run that I'm afraid of, school-teacher—except there's times that it seems to me I'm a bit afraid of Welch."

The schoolmaster's eyes narrowed. "I know something of men," he said, speaking very earnestly. "I have seen lots of them. You're right about Honaker. He's not to be trusted—especially," he added, "with people like you. I want you to promise that if he says or does anything that distresses you, you will come to me. I'm watching Honaker as closely as he's watching you."

Moonshine started. "Welch ain't watching me," she answered. "What's more, he ain't been seen hereabouts for days."

"Never mind," replied the school-teacher, unconsciously using an expression that Welch himself had used, "Welch Honaker is a man who hears without being heard, and sees without being seen. Keep out of his way as much as possible; and if you can't keep out of his way, then come to me."

He passed on, leaving her standing by the hitching post, gazing after him

as he strode along the road. Once or twice he glanced back at her and removed his hat. She waved her hand in answer. But once out of sight his head sank between his shoulders. A dejected expression made itself apparent on his face. Trouble shone from his eyes.

"It's a confounded shame," he groaned to himself. "No matter what happens we've got to save her—we've got to take care of her. I'll see to it myself."

A short time afterward he was standing at the corner of Welch Honaker's wide expanse of corn land consulting his map. The school-teacher had with malice aforethought held himself repeatedly aloof from Jeff Parlamon's plantation. No matter what might have been going on inside Jeff Parlamon's spacious shack or in any of the out-buildings, it was not the province of a schoolmaster to investigate. Not once had he crossed Jeff Parlamon's threshold or entered his domain. He had in the same way held himself aloof from the other residents in Crooked Run.

But now as he looked across the waste acres that Welch had deeded to Parlamon—as he glanced toward the broken-down homestead in the center of these acres he wondered. He looked behind him down the road, then up the road in front of him; and, obeying a sudden impulse, he dashed across the fields and reached the house. A rear door yielded to his pressure. He entered, and ransacked the house from end to end.

When he had finished, he uttered a sigh of disappointment. The place was as innocent of wrongdoing as was Moonshine Parlamon herself.

CHAPTER X.

Thursday night at seven-thirty at the district school in Crooked Run. Present, an expectant mass, gathered in full force since dusk, wriggling impatiently in seats, shuffling its feet upon the schoolhouse floor.

To the front above the platform a white sheet. To the rear an infernal machine, black, sinister, forbidding,

sizzling with the eager gases of the cylinders.

In the receipt which the schoolmaster had signed some days before for this machine, he had mentioned the fact that five men were required to operate it. Clearly this had been some sort of a mistake. There was but one operator in evidence—the schoolmaster himself.

At seven-thirty he ceased his careful adjustments and looked about him. Literally all of Crooked Run seemed to be among those present. The crazy little schoolhouse was full to overflowing. The doorway was jammed; but above the heads of those who crowded it a stream of pale white moonlight shot into the room. The shutters of the windows were thrown back, and each window framed some half dozen faces. Above these faces through the windows moonlight streamed in. The schoolmaster extinguished the single lamp that had hitherto lighted up the schoolroom.

"Too much moonlight," he commented. "We need absolute darkness. You chaps will have to come inside. There's room for all."

Noisily they obeyed, crowding in at the rear of the room behind the magic lantern. At Savage's command the shutters were thrown to and the door was closed. To the accompaniment of hysterical giggles and a surreptitious smack here and there darkness fell upon the multitude. In the midst of it the schoolmaster flashed a brilliant, dazzling, blinding white square of light upon the screen. Crooked Run shuddered as with dread. Crooked Run wondered vaguely, as Moonshine Parlamon had wondered, whether it was going to hurt.

In the midst of the awed silence the schoolmaster flashed upon the screen the portrait of the president of the United States. As he threw the pictures on the screen he glibly explained them, keeping up a running fire of talk that would have reminded an astute hearer somewhat of a prestidigitator's jargon. Not once did he permit the interest to flag. In swift succession there passed before the wondering eyes and gaping mouths of Crooked Run the

wonders of the modern world—the Brooklyn bridges, the skyscrapers of New York—a motor car—a battleship—the first efforts with the incipient aëroplane. Interspersed with this was comic relief—colored pictures that sent Crooked Run into spasmodic laughter. He gave them here and there a bit of pathos, too—crude, primitive.

He was in the very midst of "Ten Nights in a Barroom" when something happened. This something came from without and not from within. The schoolmaster had just succeeded in dragging the pictured hero into the ditch when there sounded forth upon the cool moonlit air three hoots of a screech owl.

At the first hoot, the schoolmaster's audience stiffened as with sudden shock. There was a sensation that he could feel. Without the slightest change in his voice or manner he proceeded; but he knew that they were listening not to him, but for something else.

At the second hoot silence dropped from the crowd. There was renewed shuffling of feet; there were murmurs in the darkness. Faces that reflected the strong light from the screen turned to other faces, and asked silent, wondering questions. At the third hoot all semblance of order disappeared. Pandemonium broke loose.

There was a sudden, almost hysterical rush to the four corners of the room where the guns were stacked. Every man sought and found his own. Then like unruly waters breaking down the floodgates of a dam, the turbulent and struggling occupants of the Crooked Run schoolroom poured forth from the doorway in a mass. As they did so, above the fury of the din was heard another sound—a single rifle shot.

The schoolmaster, still standing in the darkness by the side of his machine, started at the sound.

"Confound them," he muttered under his breath, "they have bungled it!"

Savage had started out with the general rush—he had almost cast discretion to the winds when he heard the rifle shot; then he remembered that he was the schoolmaster of Crooked Run.

Slowly and deliberately now he followed the crowd. The crowd had not gone far. Its rush was soon over. As he emerged from the schoolhouse door Savage could see that already it had halted, a conglomerate mass—a wilderness of rifle barrels glittering in the moonlight. Upon it suddenly had fallen a tremendous hush—a hush that was ominous. This silence was followed, however, by a medley of fierce imprecations.

"String them up!"

"Shoot 'em!"

"The dogs!"

The schoolmaster quickened his steps, and without the slightest trace of fear swept the surging mass apart with his strong arms and pressed to the very center of the arena of events. Then he started back with a cry upon his lips.

"Who did this?" he exclaimed.

His surprise was well justified, for at his very feet, with white face turned up to the moonlight, there lay the body of a man, inert and still.

The schoolmaster stooped over the prostrate figure and drew back—this time with an unuttered exclamation on his lips. The face that stared so vacantly into his own was the face of Jim Eccles, of the secret-service squad.

"There has been murder done," said Savage, straightening up and looking into the faces about him. "How did it come about?"

A deep, throaty growl arose on all sides. Sid Harkness tapped the schoolmaster on the arm. He pointed to the man lying on the ground.

"Ask him what it's all erbout," he exclaimed angrily. "And if he cain't tell yer ask them other two. The hull three er them are-murderers, I tell yer."

Savage, with another start of surprise, turned and followed the direction of Sid Harkness' gesture. In the very midst of a little nucleus of men there stood two other men, with hands stretched toward the heavens, and with a dozen rifle barrels held against their breasts.

The schoolmaster peered at their faces, and as he did so an unseen, un-

noted flash of understanding passed between his eyes and theirs, but he turned away from them and faced the clamoring crowd.

"Who are these men?" he demanded. "They don't belong here, do they? Are they strangers?"

"Yah," answered the crowd derisively, "strangers—they're worse than that—they're secret-service men."

"It's a lie," broke forth from one of the two captives. "We're State constabulary."

He got no farther. Far down the road toward Parlamon's there was heard a muffled exclamation—a hoarse cry. Three figures burst into the moonlight—three figures struggling fiercely.

"That's Harney Leveridge," exclaimed a voice at the schoolmaster's right. "Come on, boys, foller me."

In another instant a dozen bristling rifles were dashing to the rescue. The center of interest had become divided. Savage once more stooped and fumbled with the waistcoat of the man upon the ground.

"His heart has stopped beating," he exclaimed, "but there may still be a chance. Pick him up and carry him to the schoolhouse. Hurry now, you've got no time to lose."

As he gave the order, he drew forth his handkerchief and wiped the hand that had touched the breast of Eccles. When he thrust it back into his pocket its whiteness was blotched with a dull, dark stain.

Some half dozen men seized the figure on the ground, and started toward the schoolhouse, but the huge bulk of Jeff Parlamon intervened.

"You kin fetch him down to my place, schoolmaster," he said. "It's a mighty sight nearer, and you hain't got no bandages nor medicine nor licker at the schoolhouse. Fetch him this way."

"Right," answered the ringing tones of Savage, as he placed a hand upon Jeff's shoulder, "fetch him this way."

Slowly, but with excited murmurs, the multitude moved on down the road. Without a word of explanation they marched down upon the other little mass of men that struggled in the doorway,

and swept them on into Jeff Parlamon's clearing.

"Jest halt a minute," exclaimed Jeff, as he strode on ahead, "I'll make a light." At the corner of his house he held up a beckoning finger. "Moonshine's yere already," he exclaimed, with a ring of pride in his voice. "Moonshine's got a light. Come on this way."

At the end of ten minutes there was some semblance of order in the mass that gathered in Jeff's rough living room. During that interval, Moonshine Parlamon and the schoolmaster had worked silently but rapidly over the form of Jim Eccles. At last Savage shook his head in despair.

"The man is dead beyond recall," he said, "shot through the heart. The question is who shot him?"

There were four men now instead of two in custody. They were ranged side by side along one of the walls of the living room, with hands tied behind their backs. One of them answered the schoolmaster's query.

"We caught the murderer," he exclaimed. "It's that chap over there."

He jerked his head toward Harney Leveridge, who stood still, panting from the effects of his desperate struggle. Sid Harkness sprang across the room, and smote the accuser full across the mouth.

"Yer a liar," he exclaimed.

The schoolmaster was upon Sid Harkness in an instant.

"Strike a helpless man again," he cried angrily, but impersonally, "and I'll lick you within an inch of your life. For shame!"

Sid Harkness, without knowing exactly why, slunk silently into a corner. Savage's gaze traveled from one to the other of the four men.

"The name of the man you accuse," he said to them, "is Harney Leveridge. Why do you accuse him?"

"He was the one man in sight," answered the captive, "there wasn't anybody else to fire the shot. There was a shot, and the next thing he come runnin' down the road."

Savage turned abruptly to Harney

Leveridge. "Harney," he queried, "did you fire the shot?"

Harney sullenly shook his head. "I heered the shot," he answered, "and I come running up the road to find out all about it."

One of the captives jerked his head again. "That there," he said, with his eyes upon the floor, "is the gun that did the trick. We found it lying in the road and we caught him at the same time—understand."

Savage seized the gun. He hesitated for an instant, and then sniffed gingerly at the barrel.

"This gun," he announced, "has been discharged to-night. Whose gun is it?"

He examined it carefully. Upon the side of the stock were two sprawling initials, cut deep, that he studied over for a moment. Harney Leveridge started forward in surprise.

"That thar's my gun, after all," he exclaimed, a note of welcome in his voice. "I hain't had it for a week. I missed it somewhar's—"

Savage looked at him keenly. "You're sure this belongs to you?" he asked.

"Sure," answered Harney.

Savage thrust its muzzle under Harney's nose. "Smell it," he commanded. Harney obeyed. "You agree with me that it has been shot off to-night?"

Harney nodded. "That thar's a fresh powder smell," he admitted, "it seems to me—it hain't been fired long."

The schoolmaster's eyes narrowed. "You say you didn't fire the shot?"

The blood was trickling down Harney's face from a cut in his forehead that he had suffered in the struggle. He stopped to wipe it off with the sleeve of his shirt.

"I say," he answered doggedly, "that I didn't fire the shot."

The schoolmaster held Harney's glance with his own. "Do you know who did fire it?" he demanded.

Harney shook his head. "Don't know anything about it," he returned. "I didn't even see a flash—I heard a shot and come runnin' up the road."

The schoolmaster shot a puzzled glance toward him.

"Harney," he said, "one question

more. You don't have to answer it if you don't want to. Did you attend the magic-lantern lecture at the school tonight?"

For the first time the flush of confusion and uncertainty spread itself over Harney's countenance.

"It don't make no difference whether I did or whether I didn't," he returned.

"I won't press it," said the schoolmaster.

He looked keenly at the faces about him. "Whoever shot this man," he said, "seems to have shot him face to face. The bullet entered his body just below the heart—it didn't pass out."

He turned to the four men quite as abruptly as he had turned to Harney Leveridge.

"What have you got to say about it?" he demanded sharply. "Who are you, anyway—what are you doing here this time of night?"

"Ah," exclaimed Jeff Parlomon, "that's the point, schoolmaster; now you've hit the nail on the head."

Three of the men were silent; the fourth as usual became the spokesman.

"State constabulary from Louisville," he replied, "him, the dead man, and us four."

"State constabulary," repeated the schoolmaster, "where bound?"

"For the courthouse at Buchanan," responded the spokesman.

Savage hesitated. Clustered about him were threatening faces; in his ears sounded the mutterings of anger and offense—a dangerous storm was brewing. He saw that the multitude had chafed under his questioning of Harney Leveridge. The schoolmaster, too, was a stranger in Crooked Run. Only the four men ranged along the wall, with hands behind them, could understand the situation to the full. They wondered vaguely what question the schoolmaster would be asking next. They knew now that five men were in danger, and not only four.

Richard Savage took a fresh grip upon himself, and then plunged full into the maelstrom.

"You're State constabulary from Louisville," he said, in doubtful tones,

"bound for the courthouse at Buchanan. There's a straight road from Louisville to Buchanan—why this detour?"

"Ah," exclaimed the crowd at the schoolmaster's back, "let them answer that."

The spokesman never faltered. "We've been stationed for three days at Red Oak," he returned.

"What for?" demanded Savage.

"To receive a batch of convicted prisoners from the courthouse jail."

"Where bound?"

"For State's prison."

"State's prison," protested Savage, "is on a straight road, too."

"Ah," returned the spokesman, "straight roads are being watched."

"By whom?"

"Friends of the prisoners," answered the captive.

"Who are the prisoners?" queried Savage.

They told him, all four of the captives speaking almost in unison:

"Three of them—horse thieves—Hadfield, McCoy, and Sloat."

This explanation was followed by a doubtful silence that was music to the ears of Richard Savage. He turned to the crowd behind him.

"Are there such men?" he asked.

"Yes," grumbled Jeff Parlomon, "we heern tell about 'em—desperate characters they are."

"The sheriff," went on the spokesman, "was to meet us with his prisoners at Red Oak."

"Why, then," demanded Savage, "did you find it necessary to climb the hill?"

There was not a tremor of the captive's eyelids. "Orders were changed," he answered. "There was a leak somewhere. Prisoners' friends had learned our route. There was danger—big danger—that the sheriff would be tackled on this very route, somewhere between Ellenbogen and Buchanan. We were ordered to Buchanan."

A supercilious smile lit up the face of Richard Savage. "And, you come afoot!" he exclaimed, with the air of a skillful cross-examiner.

A murmur of approbation arose at his significant question.

"Let 'em answer that," repeated Jeff Parlamon.

The spokesman answered it. "We come afoot for a mighty good reason, pardner," he returned. "The State constabulary travels horseback—the friends of the prisoners are looking for seven mounted men, and not for five men traveling afoot. If you don't believe what I tell you," he answered belligerently, "put your hand in my breast pocket and you'll find our credentials."

The school-teacher did as he was bid. He drew forth a folded document and held it under the light. Jeff Parlamon beckoned to his daughter.

"Moonshine," he said, "per'aps you'd better have a look at this."

Moonshine flushed at the doubt of the schoolmaster that was implied by Jeff's suggestion.

"No," she returned.

"Yes," insisted Savage, "I wish you would. Come here."

With his shoulder against hers and with her hair brushing his forehead, the schoolmaster read slowly and distinctly the instructions that the five men had carried with them.

"Is it all so, Moonshine?" asked Jeff Parlamon.

"Yes," answered Moonshine, with a note of protest in her voice, "word for word."

Without further parley, Savage thrust the papers into the breast pocket of the captive.

"Have you anything else to say?" he asked.

"Only this," answered the spokesman, "you've got about ten men to one of us. You've got the drop on us, and you can do what you like, but if you don't set us loose there's two things that's going to happen: In the first place, you'll have the whole State buzzing around your ears; and in the second place, as sure as guns, you'll set three horse thieves—desperate characters—loose on your barns." He shrugged his shoulders. "You can take your choice," he said.

Harney Leveridge broke forth into laughter. "It's all a pack of lies, I b'-lieve," he said. He pointed to where

the dead man lay under the light. "The name of that man is Jim Eccles," he informed the schoolmaster, "and he's a secret-service man, or I'll eat my hat. He come through yere trying to ketch Moonshine Parlamon—tryin' to send her to gov'ment prison."

"Are you sure?" queried the schoolmaster.

"You kin ask Moonshine," answered Harney Leveridge, "she'll tell you straight."

The teacher turned to Moonshine. "What do you say?" he asked.

Moonshine told the story of the man with the "yallerbacks"—Keg Ferguson's friend. It was told convincingly and with a consistent logic that made the four captives move uneasily within their bonds. Savage whirled almost angrily upon them.

"What have you got to say about it?" he demanded.

Before they could answer there was a commotion at the doorway—a confused hubbub—and then a figure broke through the excited group and darted into the lamplight.

It was Tacy Ann Jarrett. She was whimpering, shaking like a frightened animal. She started toward Moonshine, and then suddenly drew back. At her feet lay the silent figure of Jim Eccles. She uttered a hoarse cry and pressed both hands over her face, as though to shut out the sight. It was in that instant that Moonshine saw upon the third finger of Tacy Ann's left hand the ring that Harney Leveridge had offered her. In the next instant Tacy Ann, still whimpering, was pointing straight toward Harney Leveridge's face.

"He did it," she cried. "I seen him do it. He hid behind a rock—he hid in the shadder. Thar war five men creepin' up along the road. Thar war one of them goin' on ahead, and thar war four of them hangin' behind, and I seen him—I seen Harney Leveridge aim for him, and shoot him down and kill him."

There was deep silence for an instant. "What did you do then?" demanded the school-teacher.

"I run away," whimpred Tacy Ann,

"as far as I could, and I come back to tell the truth."

She was glaring with an uncanny stare at the dead man now. Her face was as white as chalk, but across it, as though painted there by the sweep of an artist's crimson brush, there was a deep red mark. The schoolmaster placed his finger on it.

"How did you get that?" he demanded.

She hid her face again in her hands. "He beat me," she whimpered, "he beat me so as to make me promise not to tell."

"Who beat you?" asked Savage.

"Harney Leveridge," she answered.

"It's a lie," cried Harney indignantly.

Moonshine, regardless of all that had passed, darted to Tacy Ann's side, and caught her in her arms.

"Tacy Ann," she cried, in a shocked voice, "it can't be true—Harney Leveridge wouldn't do a thing like that."

Before she could answer, and while she was still whimpering and shuddering in Moonshine's arms, a burly figure pressed to the fore.

"What's all this yere goin' on?" demanded a gruff voice. "Have you-all gone crazy? I've jest come up from Ellenbogen."

The speaker was Welch Honaker. Jeff Parlamon held up his hand.

"Jest a minute, Welch," he said, "we've got a little point to settle yere. Tacy Ann, don't be afeared of anybody. Jest answer a question. You're sure that it war Harney Leveridge that fired the shot, and you're sure that Harney beat you to make you keep yo' mouth closed?"

Welch looked at Tacy Ann wonderingly.

"I'm sure," sobbed Tacy Ann.

"It's a lie," said Harney.

Welch lowered his eyes, and started back. He stretched a clumsy forefinger toward the man upon the floor.

"Harney," he cried, "if it hain't that thar Jim Eccles that put his hand on Moonshine——"

"What!" thundered Jeff.

"What was goin' ter put his hand on Moonshine," went on Welch, holding up

his hand, "when Harney interfered. It was well for him that he didn't lay his hand on Moonshine, I kin tell yer, or Harney would have——"

He stopped as though with a jerk.

"Harney would have what?" queried Richard Savage.

"Huh," answered Welch Honaker, "I guess I've said enough. You don't get no more out of me. I'm a friend of Harney Leveridge's, I tell yer."

"You sure are, Welch," said Harney.

Welch shook his finger angrily. "It was a good job killin' that Eccles," he said; "he was a secret-service man. What's he prowlin' around Crooked Run for?" He caught sight suddenly of the four men backed against the wall. "Who air these yere?" he demanded. "Air they secret-service men? They look pizened enough to be."

Savage, the new schoolmaster, took quick note of the fact that Jeff had suddenly and by common consent assumed the leadership. His spirits sank as he realized this fact.

"Let me tell you the whole story, Honaker," he said.

Swiftly he detailed the events of the evening and the explanation of the captives. He exhibited to Welch the alleged credentials of the men.

"What have you got to say about Jim Eccles, yere?" demanded Welch of the spokesman.

The spokesman only smiled. "Jim Eccles was through here some time ago," he admitted, "laying the plans for just what we are putting through; shouldn't be a bit surprised if Jim Eccles made out to be a secret-service man just to put them horse thieves and their friends off the track. Jim Eccles was pretty slick at putting people off the track."

Welch Honaker looked at Savage. "What d'you think of it?" he said.

The query surprised the schoolmaster more than it did the multitude.

"I don't know what to think of it," returned Richard Savage, with a puzzled air.

Welch folded his arms and thought in silence for a moment. Then he turned to Savage.

"Jest foller me," he said.

He drew him into the darkness of the lean-to and closed the door behind him. His air became unusually friendly.

"It looks to me, Schoolmaster Savage," he said slowly, "as though Harney Leveridge has made a bull of this yere thing. It looks to me as though these men war tellin' us jest about the truth."

The new schoolmaster started in the darkness. He did not understand.

"I don't know what to believe," he admitted.

Welch grunted. "You know what'll happen to these strangers, don't you, Schoolmaster Savage, if I say the word?"

"They'll be shot or hanged, I suppose," answered Savage, in even tones.

Welch grunted again. "They'll jest disappear," he answered, "nobody will ever lay eyes on them again, not alive nor not dead—that's what'll happen to them, if I see fit to allow it. That ain't the point. If these men air tellin' the truth, then Crooked Run's got no right to interfere. That hain't the point, either," he persisted. "I'm supposin' that they're liars, every one of them, and that they deserve all Crooked Run could give 'em. Thar's four of 'em, and that's the trouble. The gov'ment mebbe don't alluz trouble its head about the killin' of a man, but if four of 'em was spirited away—what would become of Crooked Run?"

"Gad," answered Richard Savage, "you're right. I didn't see it in that light before. What's your idea?"

"My idee," returned Welch Honaker, "is to call it quits, and let them go."

A moment later Honaker was moving ponderously from man to man, calming the excitement, muttering a threat here, whispering arguments conclusive and irresistible, as he went along. Finally he drew his hunting knife from his belt and approached the four men:

"Faces to the wall," he commanded.

"Going to knife us in the back, are you?" queried the spokesman gamely.

"Faces to the wall," thundered Welch.

A dozen rifles enforced the command. The four men turned their backs upon

the crowd, lining up shoulder to shoulder. With four swift movements of his knife, Welch Honaker rapidly severed the ropes that bound them.

"Now turn about," he said. He waved his hand. "Nobody'll harm you," he assured them. "You're free to go, only don't come back yere any more."

The four men stood and merely stared at him.

"You're free to go, I said," yelled Welch Honaker.

Slowly they shook their heads. "We don't go," said the spokesman, in even tones, "unless we can take with us the murderer of Jim Eccles."

This challenge was the signal for another series of deep-voiced growls from the friends of Harney Leveridge. One or two rifles clicked to full cock.

"Never," yelled the crowd.

The spokesman looked calmly and fearlessly about him. "We don't go," he repeated, "unless we take the murderer of Jim Eccles."

The deluge of anger was about to break upon him and his three companions, but Welch and the new schoolmaster held back the crowd with uplifted arms.

"What's the matter with you?" yelled Welch to his colleagues. "Have you gone mad—are you plumb crazy—moonstruck? Listen to me. Have you got no confidence in the schoolmaster, Mr. Savage, yere?"

"He's a stranger," yelled the crowd.

"He's a stranger," conceded Welch, "but he's got brains. Hain't you got no confidence in me if you hain't in him?"

"We're with you, Welch," cried a number of voices.

"You believe in me, do you?" queried Welch.

"We sure do," was the response.

"You know I'll tell you true?"

"We sure do."

Welch raised his heavy hand high in the air, and brought it crashing down upon the oaken table. His eyes redened.

"Then you got to do as I say," he thundered. "I don't keer whether these yere be gov'ment or State men. I don't

keer whether they're liars or whether they tell the truth. I tell you I knows when the time has come to raise this yere hand and to smite a gov'ment man, and I tell you the time has not yet come. You'll do as I say, all of you of Crooked Run, or it'll be the worse for you."

He held back the crowd with both

arms, affording a clean passage to the door. He nodded to the four men.

"We'll take keer of Jim Eccles for you," he assured them. "You kin take Harney Leveridge along. Give me a gun. Schoolmaster Savage and Welch Honaker will escort you safe to Ellenbogen with your prisoner. Now go."

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE AUGUST 23RD.



CRITICISM BRUTALLY FRANK

KLAW & ERLANGER, the theatrical producers, put on a musical comedy in New York not long ago and predicted that it would be a grand and glittering success. On the opening night Frank P. Morse, who works in the K. & E. offices, took a friend to see the performance, having assured him beforehand that he was about to witness the best show ever exposed to the glare of the foot-lights. At the end of the first act the friend turned to Morse, and pleaded in a loud tone of voice:

"Frank, take me out of this right away! This is the dreariest, gloomiest, most dismal failure I ever saw."

"Shut up!" exclaimed Morse, in a panic. "Keep quiet until we leave the building."

Outside in the street, he turned to his friend, and exclaimed:

"You've ruined me for life! When you made that remark, Marc Klaw was sitting right behind you and Abe Erlanger right in front of you."



THE TOLL THAT CHARLIE TOLE TOOK

WHEN Charlie Tole went to work for the Armours in Chicago, he learned that it was the habit of Philip Armour to get down to his desk every morning at half past six o'clock. A month after Tole took his job, Philip returned to town, and the following morning Charlie was at his desk at 6:30 o'clock for the first time in his life.

Mr. Armour walked in at 6:33, pinched himself to see if he was awake, and then stared at Tole. Charlie went on with his arduous labors.

"How long have you been working here?" asked the magnate.

"Oh, about a month," replied Charlie carelessly.

"Do you get down to work at this time every morning?" continued Armour, immensely pleased.

"I do," said Charlie, "when you're in town."

This brutal frankness made a hit with Armour, and always after that Tole was one of his favorites.

When Christmas came, he called Charlie into his office, produced a handsome gold watch and chain, handed it to Tole, and said graciously:

"You have rendered valuable service to this business, and I think it deserves recognition. I give you this as a sign of my appreciation."

Tole took the watch, examined it appreciatively, and then gravely handed it back.

"No," he said slowly. "I'm sorry, but I can't accept that, Mr. Armour."

"Why not?" asked the big man, in amazement.

"Because," explained Tole, "I've been informed that, if you ever give a man a present, you never raise his salary."

When Death Laughs Last

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "In the Sawdust," "All in the Business," Etc.

The live-stock commission man on the trail of the Indian cattle owners. He would just about as soon have gone to Alaska to land reindeer shipments from the blubber eaters—but he goes after the redskins. The experience taught the commission man one thing: that it isn't good to laugh at an Indian.

THE one thing that made Billy Dayton the best commission man in the Chicago stockyards was that he never overlooked any bets. He was always reachin' out for new business; and unless it was tied down with loans, or spiked by some bank, he generally got it. Don't figger by that that he was tryin' to hog the country—like some I knows of. He just wanted to see things movin'. He wanted to make this year's business better than last. He was in love with his work, and liked to see his business grow. And when I was on the road, headin' shippers into the pens of the Dayton Live Stock Commission Company, I felt just like Billy, and worked for him exactly as I would for myself.

He paid me the top salary for my kind in the yards—never questioned my expense, and, except for a general line-up, let me have my own way. Further, when it was a good year, he'd slip me a Christmas present, and it generally was a good, heavy check, enough to stake Leona and me to clothes for the year. What more he did is not in place here; but it's a fact, that Billy Dayton found me a busted cow-puncher in Chicago, gave me a chance, and is mostly responsible for me bein' on Easy Street today.

But let us whirl back to work. Says Billy to me one day as I was headin' West: "Johnny, what do you think of

them Injun cattle along the N. P.? Hadn't we ought to go after them?"

"I suppose so," I replies. "They hain't much account, though. They hold 'em till they're big stags—seven and eight years old; and some of 'em you couldn't head into a street on account of their horns. But I'll go after them, if you say so."

Billy lit a slim black cigar, and slung his feet up on the desk. "Better bring 'em in," he says finally. "Get one Injun started, and we'll have the whole tribe—breeds and all."

"All right," I agrees, "but I can't say I like the job, Billy. Injuns are good people in their way, but their ways hain't mine. I'd just about as soon go up to Alaska to land reindeer shipments from them blubber eaters. But, of course, I'll go after the redskins."

Nothin' much bearin' on the Injun question was said after that. We cleaned up some stuff, and settled some questions that had been puzzlin' us, and then I grabbed my grips and dragged it West.

In about ten days I'm headed toward the Injun country in a top buggy, and drivin' a pair of good little blacks out of a livery stable in the N. P. town, from which railroad burg I'm better than a two days' drive.

I'm pickin' up business all along, and havin' a good time besides, and overlookin' nothin'—not even the nesters with a half a load apiece.

That particular afternoon, I'm calculatin' on reachin' the Hazelton ranch, to put up for the night. Hazelton has a big place, and ships to us. I always like to be among folks I know; and from past experiences, I figgers that I'll get a warm welcome from Dug Hazelton.

When I'm within maybe five miles of Hazelton's, I sights a new ranch—one that's been built up since my last trip. It's about five o'clock, and I've loads of time, so I pulls in at the new place and introduces myself.

The owners of the ranch are a couple of young fellers from Chicago, who've located homesteads, bought a small bunch of she-stock, and are settin' out to be cattle kings. Their names are MacLeod and Rivers, and the tar paper is yet new on their shacks. They've only been away from the city long enough to cut their first hay crop, and they're sure glad to see anybody from Chicago. Nothin' must do but for me to stay to supper.

I tells 'em I'm headed for Hazelton's, but that makes no odds. I must eat supper with them, they insist, visit a while, and then—if I just have to—make a moonlight drive to Hazelton's. That sounds good to me, and they help me unhook and put up my team.

We set down to supper in Rivers' shack. MacLeod has a shanty on his claim, but it's only to square himself with the law. They live mostly in Rivers' wikiup. Well, we's a-settin' back after supper, enjoyin' our pipes and cigarettes, when some one hollers outside.

"Ho-ho-hay!" calls the new arrival, in a deep voice. We gets up to welcome him, MacLeod yellin': "Come on in!"

"It's Billy Blackwolf," says Rivers to his partner. "How, Billy?"

The Injun—and he was a full blood, too, come in and shook hands all 'round. "Stop with you to-night?" he asks, in his Injun way.

"Sure thing!" says Rivers. "Put your hoss up, and we'll fix you a snack."

The two told me that they'd known Billy Blackwolf since they struck the country; that he was a gov'ment-edu-

cated Injun, and they treated him better than the dog-eatin', blanket kind. They said he was a good Injun, and one of the best cow-punchers in the country.

When Billy Blackwolf come in from puttin' up his hoss, I took gapin's at him. He wore the regular cowboy rig, with the exception of his gloves, which were fancied up with beads, and a high-crowned black hat banded with a red ribbon. He was a good-lookin' young Injun—was that same Billy Blackwolf—and I kind of took to him. I could see he was proud and high-lifed, and that the world was a serious proposition so far as he was concerned. I didn't say much to him—too much talk cheapens a white man in an Injun's eyes.

The red boy showed a mighty white set of teeth as he sat down. "How you been?" he asks his friends.

"Fine!" comes back MacLeod. "How you been?"

"Good!" Billy tells him. "Work for O H all summer. Go to agency now—see father—mother." He was educated, but he still spoke in short, Injun style. He smiles for thinkin' of bein' back with his folks.

Then Rivers, forgettin' his manners, tells me on the side that it hain't only his people Billy Blackwolf is a-ridin' them long miles to see. The Injun boy is stuck on Bessie Hazelton, Dug Hazelton's daughter. It's Billy's style to never stop there for over three or four hours; and durin' that time he sets around, not sayin' anything, but lookin' at the girl for all he's worth. Then he'll give her some present and skip. He'd been known to ride through a blizzard to bring her a Christmas present, and stay ten minutes. Rivers goes on to tell me that the Injun's love-makin' is a joke to Bessie and her family. The girl takes his gifts, as she don't want to offend him; but she thinks it a great josh to have an Injun sweetheart.

While he's tellin' me the stuff—and I don't thank him much for it—Rivers acts like he, too, thinks it's funny. He goes over and stretches out on the bunk, and proceeds to kid the Injun about Bessie.

The idea of joshin' an Injun makes

no hit with me. An Injun has a heart, same as any one else; and, believe me, if some wide-mouthed yap had kidded me about Leona when I was courtin' her, I'd 'a' slammed a gun up against his face, and told him to kid that if he still felt funny. There's jokes and jokes, and the poorest one is that which brings in a girl or woman's name. I don't like it, and it always makes me sore.

Rivers puffed his pipe and grinned. "Goin' to see Bessie in the mornin', Billy?" he inquires, and I begins dislikin' him right away.

"Maybe," replies the Injun, short like. He leaned over to unbuckle his spurs, and the tips of his two thick black braids almost touched the floor. I couldn't see his face.

"Well, it won't do you much good," goes on Rivers, enjoyin' his little joke. "Mac and I have beat your time. Of course, it is not settled yet which one of us will win her, but we've got you beat, all right."

"Here, Billy," busts in MacLeod, as he reaches for the coffeepot, "pull up your chair and eat something."

The Injun, without sayin' a word, sets up to his grub.

"Billy is sore because we cut him out," keeps on Rivers, raisin' his head, and winkin' at his pardner.

MacLeod grins, and jumps right into the joke. "Y'ought not to mind us cuttin' you out," he says, pleasant like, as he lit his pipe. "There's lots of pretty squaws left when Bessie's gone."

"You bet!" chimes in Rivers. "Heaps and heaps of squaws left, Billy, when one of us gets Bessie."

The Injun suddenly quits eatin'.

"What's the matter, Billy?" asks MacLeod. "Want more coffee?"

The red boy turns his big, dark eyes upon the white men, first to one and then the other. Me he don't look at. "No. Plenty," he says, soft as can be, but diggin' at his collar like it hurt his throat.

"That's the way with them all," laughs Rivers, the funny man. "When a man's in love, he never can eat, especially when he's in Billy's shape—in love and cut out of his girl." He laughs

again, and repeats: "In love and cut out of his girl."

The Injun pushed back his chair, and tried to talk of something else. He even smiled as he made a stagger at interestin' them in what he'd been doin' on the range that summer. But the white men had to have their little joke. They turned the talk back to the Injun's love for Bessie Hazelton, and the slim chance he had 'of winnin' her against them. The Injun finally cut out all talk. But still the white men blabbed on. It finally got too much for me, and I forgot I was visitin' them. Rivers had just made a statement regardin' Bessie Hazelton. He just said it careless and loose-mouthed. Don't suppose he meant it, only to tease the Injun, but still it made me mad.

"Look-a-here, boys," I tells 'em straight, "this isn't a fair deal. You've got no right to talk this way. Billy's attendin' to his own business ——"

Rivers busts in on me: "Oh, don't get excited."

I looked at him, and sized him up. He was a feller about thirty-six years old, with not much to him. He had one of them faces that you can go into any store in Chicago and pick out a dozen just like him. In fact, there was so little to him that I don't remember how he looked. He was just plum' ordinary. As for MacLeod, I might say here that he was a little fat man, with slick black hair and a rather kind, smooth-shaven face. There wasn't a great deal of character to MacLeod except in his mouth, and that run nearly to his ears. He, too, was ordinary, and I have seen thousands like him, standin' around on Madison Street.

Rivers' remark kind of riled me. I didn't like his air, anyway. He was a dub. Anybody could see that he was a dub. But he had a kind of a superior, I'm-just-out-here-for-fun way, and I don't take to that. If you're goin' to run a ranch, or hold up a train, or whatever you do, do it like you meant business. Be the real thing.

Don't you know there's men you don't hitch with right at the start? And Rivers was one of them kind. His sayin',

"Oh, don't get excited!" to a man who'd been through more real life than him and all of his half-baked tribe, made me sort of fussy. I got up out of my chair and looks at him good and strong as he lays in his bunk.

"I am not excited, Mister Rivers," I puts it at him cold, "but I'm goin' to tell you a few facts, even if I am in your house. There's a heap you have to learn about the West. You've a style of jokin' that'll get you a chunk of lead in your lungs some of these fine days. Your brand of humor hain't popular in this country. Further, I know Bessie Hazelton to be a good girl, and that if Billy Blackwolf likes her, that's his business, and not yours. From what I've heard and saw, Billy is more of a gentleman than you——"

"Here, here," breaks in little fat MacLeod, "we didn't——"

I whirls on him. "That goes with you, too. Take it or leave it alone." MacLeod closes up the slit in his face, and gets back of the stove.

I was mad, and ready to fight. Walkin' over to the Injun, I puts out my hand. "Shake!" I tells him. "You're a gentleman." He shakes hands with me, but his face is stony.

Turnin', I grabs my hat, and leaves the shack without a word. Nor does the pair say anything to me as I pass out. I was still tremblin' with bein' mad, as I hooked up my team and hit out for Hazelton's.

Dug Hazelton give me an old-fashioned welcome, and the family, includin' Bessie, set up 'way late, visitin' with me. Of course, I didn't mention my row with MacLeod and Rivers, as it hain't my style to stir up trouble between neighbors. Still, I tells 'em I stopped at the nesters' shack and met Billy Blackwolf. Bessie giggled a little as I mentioned the red boy's name, and the whole family smiled, but nothin' was said. While we're talkin', just to be visitin', a cow-puncher come in with the mail. He was introduced to me, and told me he stopped in to give MacLeod and Rivers their mail, got 'em out of bed, and found they'd made Billy Blackwolf a shakedown on the floor.

The Hazeltons read their mail, and Dug passed me over one of the Dayton market letters, which showed good sales. I read it, and we talked a little more, and then turned in.

In the mornin', Billy Blackwolf showed up, his face lookin' about as intelligent as a copper plate. He seemed to be wearin' a mask.

Kind of likin' him, and I guess on account of me takin' his part the night before he did me, we got to talkin', that is, when he wasn't lookin' at Bessie. I tell him my business, and that I'm after the Injuns' cattle. I asks him to boost for me among his people—full bloods and breeds. He nods his head, and tells me he's my friend, and will do all he can for me. That settles it, and I give him my card, which he puts carefully away inside his shirt. We then go to talkin' about range work.

Billy Blackwolf takes dinner with the Hazeltons, watchin' Bessie all the time; and then, after sayin' good-by to everybody, and leavin' Bessie a little present—some kind of a gold trinket—hits the trail.

The afternoon wore away, Hazelton puttin' in his time showin' me over the ranch. We went out to look at some of his fat cattle he's holdin' close in. We rode back to the house, lazy like, talkin' cow. As we rode up the lane, a wild-eyed puncher, stumblin' on his high heels, come up to us afoot. He'd been to the house, and his hoss was standin' near the well. He yells: "MacLeod and Rivers have been murdered!"

"Murdered!" busts out Hazelton, and I echo him, feelin' paralyzed.

"Yes, yes! All hacked up in their bunk!" The puncher was speakin' fast, and still sick at what he'd seen. "I stops," he says, "to pass them the time o' day, and found—— Ugh! it made me sick!"

Hazelton woke up and took charge. Says he to the puncher: "Go get your hoss, and see if Jackson's in the stable. Both of you follow us over there." He threw a hand toward the nesters' place.

The cow-puncher obeyed the order, and then Hazelton whirled his hoss and says to me: "Come on, Johnny. This is

bad business." I was too stunned to say anything as we hit the trail.

It was not a pleasant sight that met our eyes as we goes into the shack where I'd taken supper the night before. The room was lit up with the red light of the settin' sun, and in the bunk in the corner was two huddled-up shapes that had once been MacLeod and Rivers. We goes up close, and finds both of them have been shot in the face and then cut up, but apparently they never knew what hit 'em.

We scurries around the shack, inside and out, and Hazelton finds that there is an empty shell in a six-shooter hangin' on the wall. He says the gun belongs to Rivers. Then, after a lot of searchin', we finds a bloodstained ax in some near-by bushes.

The sight of that ax settled a certain question in my mind; but before I could speak, Hazelton says: "Injun work. And Billy Blackwolf was here last night."

"Yes," I says, kind of sad. "He was here last night, but there's another side to the story." Then I tells the old woman how the nesters had talked to the Injun boy, and what they'd said about Bessie. Dug shakes his head.

"The poor fools have paid the penalty," says he. "They had their little joke, all right, but Death laughed last."

Just then the rider who'd found the murdered men, with Dug's handy man, Jackson, come tearin' up.

"Hit out for the county seat!" Hazelton orders the rider. "Tell the sheriff to grab Billy Blackwolf, and get the coroner out here as quick as possible." The rider whirls his hoss, and is gone.

Hazelton leaves his man Jackson to guard the bodies, and we goes back to the ranch.

Accordin' to Billy's confession, after I left that night, MacLeod makes the Injun a shakedown on the floor. Then the white men turn into their bunk. The red boy hasn't said anything; but because of Rivers naggin him with talk

about Bessie, his heart has turned bad, and he wants blood. When he's satisfied they're sound asleep, he gets up soft as a cat, takes Rivers' six-shooter, hangin' on the wall, and his own; goes over to the two sleepers, and, shovin' the guns in their faces, pulls the triggers. Then, because he has forgot his education, forgot everything except his Injun feelin's, he finishes up the job with an ax.

"Then," said the deputy, who told of Billy's first confession, "he says, 'They no get Bessie now.'"

It was a short trial. Billy Blackwolf stuck to his confession just as he had given it to the deputies. He was sentenced to be hung. He asked to see his father and mother, and they let him. That was about all, except that he went to his finish without a flutter, singin' the death song as the black cap come down over his eyes.

I went back to my work, and after the Injuns' cattle. Believe me, I sure got them. Them full bloods and breeds treated me like I was Sittin' Bull himself. It was like gatherin' ripe cherries — gettin' that Injun business.

I couldn't understand why they were so strong for me. It seems they knew me. Some of the full bloods even called me by an Injun name. I asks a breed what they meant. "They call you Straight Tongue," he tells me, "or Man-who-tells-the-truth." I felt rather pleasant at the bouquet.

One day I meets the mother and father of Billy Blackwolf. Although I had never met them before, they were very glad to see me. The old buck, Billy Blackwolf's dad, pulled me into his tepee, and proceeded to fish around in a kind of a war bag. All of a sudden he brought out one of my cards, dirty and stained with sweat, but on the back of it was a little Injun drawin' that looked like two hands reachin' toward each other. I guess it was the sign of friendship, for it was with that feelin' I had given that piece of pasteboard to Billy Blackwolf.

The Cloud-Bursters

BEING THE FIFTH IN THE SERIES OF RAILROAD MYSTERIES INVESTIGATED
BY CALVIN SPRAGUE, SCIENTIST AND CRIMINOLOGIST

By Francis Lynde

*Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western,"
"The Fight for the G. V. & P.," Etc.*

(In Two Parts—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

IT was an article in the news columns of the Brewster *Morning Tribune* which first called attention to the plans and purposes of the Mesquite Valley Land and Irrigation Company.

Connabel, a hard-working reporter on the *Tribune*, had been sent over to Angels, the old headquarters of the Red Butte Western on the other side of the Timanyonis, to get the story of a shooting affray which had localized itself in Pete Grim's place, the one remaining Angels saloon. Finding the barroom battle of little worth as a news story, and having time to kill between trains, Connabel had strolled off up the gulch beyond the old copper mines, and had stumbled upon the construction camp of the Mesquite Company.

Being short of "copy" on the fight story, the reporter had written up the irrigation project, taking the general outlines from a foreman on the job whose tongue he loosened with a handful of Brewster cigars. A big earth dam was in process of construction across the mouth of the rather precipitous valley of Mesquite Creek; and the mesa below, which to Connabel seemed a very Sahara of desolation, was to be made to blossom like the rose.

Kendall, managing editor of the *Tribune*, had run the story, partly because real news happened to be scarce at the moment, and partly out of sheer aston-

ishment that an enterprise of the magnitude of the Mesquite project had not already flooded the country with the brass-band publicity literature which is supposed to attract investors.

That a land and irrigation company should actually wait until its dam was three-fourths completed before it began to advertise was a thing sufficiently curious to call for editorial comment. Why Editor Kendall did not comment on the news item as a matter of singular interest is a query which answered itself on the loggia porch of the Hotel Topaz in the evening of the day on which Connabel's write-up appeared.

It was Kendall's regular habit to close his desk at seven o'clock and to spend a leisurely hour over his dinner at the Topaz before settling down to his night's work. On the evening in question he had chanced to sit at table with Maxwell, the general superintendent of the railroad, and with Maxwell's friend and college classmate, Calvin Sprague, the big, genial, hard-muscled expert chemist of the government service, who was making Brewster his temporary headquarters in a soil-testing campaign.

After dinner, the three had gone out to the loggia porch to smoke; and it was the big chemistry expert who spoke of the Mesquite news story which had appeared that morning in the *Tribune*.

"Yes," said the editor, "Connabel got on to that yesterday. We've all known, in a general way, that the company were

doing something over there; but I had no idea that they'd got their dam pretty nearly done and were about ready to open up for business."

"It's pure wild cat!" cut in Maxwell. "What they're going to do to a lot of woolly investors will be good and plenty. That mesa land is just about as fertile as this street pavement here."

Kendall was a dried-up little wisp of a man, with a leathern face and tired eyes.

"That's what you'd think—that they are out for the easy money," he said. "But there is something a little queer about it. They haven't advertised."

"Not here,"—supplemented Maxwell. "That would be a trifle too rank. Everybody in the Timanyoni knows what that land is over in the edge of the Red Desert."

"They haven't advertised anywhere, so far as I can ascertain," put in the editor quietly. "What is more, Jennings, who is the engineer in charge of the building of the dam, and seems to be the only man in authority on the ground, came in this afternoon and raised sand with me for printing the news story. He said they were not exploiting the scheme here at all; that their money and their investors were all in the East, and they were asking no odds of the Brewster newspapers."

"Bitter sort of devil, that fellow, Jennings," was Maxwell's comment; but it was the big chemist who said:

"What reason did he give for making such an extraordinary break as that, Mr. Kendall?"

"Oh, he had his reason pat enough," rejoined the editor, with his tired smile. "He said he realized that we had irrigated land of our own over here in the park upon which we are anxious to get settlers, and that public sentiment here would be against the Mesquite project. He asked, as a matter of fairness, that we simply let the project alone. It had been financed without taking a dollar out of the Timanyoni, so we could not urge that there were local investors to be protected."

"Umph! So he admitted that their investors might need protection, did

he?" scoffed the railroad superintendent. "They certainly will if they expect to get any of the money back that they've been spending in Mesquite Valley. Why, Kendall, Mesquite Creek is bone dry half the year!"

"And the other half?" inquired Sprague.

"It's a cloudburst proposition, like a good many of the foothill arroyos," said Maxwell. "Once, in a summer storm, I saw a wall of water ten feet high come down that valley, tumbling twenty-ton bowlders in the thick of it as if they had been brook pebbles. Then, for a month, maybe, it would be as dry as a sand creek."

"Perhaps they are counting upon storing the cloudburst water," chuckled Kendall dryly. Then, as he rose to go back to his work: "As you say, Maxwell, it has all the symptoms of the wild-cat. But so long as it doesn't stick its claws out at us, I suppose we haven't much excuse for butting in. Good night, gentlemen. Drop in on me when you're up my way. Always glad to see you."

The two who remained on the hotel porch after the editor went away smoked in comradely silence for a time. The night was enchantingly fine, with a second-quarter moon swinging high in a vault of velvety blackness, and a gentle breeze, fragrant with the breath of the mountain forests, creeping down upon the city from the backgrounding highlands. Across the plaza, and somewhere in the yards behind the long, two-story railroad headquarters building and station, a night crew was making up trains, and the clank and crash of coupling cars mingled with the rapid-fire exhausts of the switching engine.

The big-bodied chemistry expert was the first to break the companionable silence, asking a question which had reference to an epidemic of disaster and demoralization which had recently swept over Maxwell's railroad.

"Well, how are things coming by this time, Dick? Are the men responding fairly well to that little circular-letter, man-to-man appeal we concocted?"

"They are, for a fact," was the hearty

assurance. "They've been coming in squads to 'fess up and take the pledge, and to assure me that it's the water wagon for theirs from now on."

"Good!" cried Sprague. "And now I think you can call the booze fight and the demoralization troubles past, and begin to look around you for the signs and symptoms of the next biff you're going to get."

The stockily built little man who stood as the railroad company's chief field officer on the far Western fighting line moved uneasily in his chair.

Throughout the summer a coterie of New York stock jobbers, unnamed, and as yet unnamable, to the fighting management of the Pacific Southwestern, had been resorting to all sorts of lawless expedients to cripple, and by the crippling to acquire the Southwestern's Nevada Short Line extending from Copah on the east to Lorch on the west.

The latest of the expedients had been an attempt to demoralize the service—and so to cut down the earnings and to "bear" the securities—by bribing a minor official to destroy company property and to spread dissipation in the rank and file; an attempt from which the service was only now struggling to recover.

"I've been hoping there wasn't going to be any 'next time,'" said the gritty little superintendent, chewing hard upon his cigar.

"I'd hope with you, Dick, if we had been able, in any of the former scraps, to secure good, indubitable court evidence against the men who are backing these buccaneering raids on your securities. Thus far we haven't been able to 'get' the man or men higher up. Therefore, you may continue to sleep on your arms and to keep an eye out for surprises."

"I guess that is good advice; but it is pretty difficult to put into practice, Calvin. There are five hundred miles of this railroad, and my job of operating them is big enough to keep me busy without doing any detective stunts on the side."

"I know," admitted Calvin Sprague reflectively; "and for that reason I've

been keeping an eye out for you myself."

"You have? Don't tell me you've found more grief!"

"I don't want to pose as an alarmist," said Sprague; "but I'd like to inquire how much or how little you know about this Mesquite irrigation scheme."

"Next to nothing. About two months ago, Jennings, the construction engineer, made application for the through handling, from Copah, of a trainload of machinery, tools, and camp outfit. He asked to have the stuff delivered at the end of the old copper-mine spur above Angels. We put the spur in shape for him and delivered the freight."

"Well, what else?"

"That is about all we've had to do with them in a business way. Two weeks ago, when we had that wreck at Lobo, they were asking Benson for an extension of the copper-mine spur to a point nearer their job; chiefly, I think, so they could run a hand car back and forth between the camp and the saloon of Angels. Benson didn't recommend it, and the matter was dropped."

"Without protest?"

"Oh, yes. Jennings didn't make much of a roar. In fact, I've always felt that he avoided me when he could. He's in town a good bit, but I rarely see him. Somebody told me he tried once to get into the Town and Country Club, and didn't make it. I don't know who would blackball him, or why; but some one evidently did."

Sprague puffed away industriously for a full minute before he said:

"Does it occur to you that there is something a bit mysterious about this dry-land irrigation scheme, Dick?"

"I had never thought of it as being mysterious. It's a palpable swindle, of course; but swindles are like the poor—they're always with us."

"By the way," said Sprague suddenly, "where is your brother-in-law—Starbuck? I haven't seen him for three or four days."

"Billy has been in Red Butte attending to a little mining deal in which we are both interested. But I am looking for him back to-night."

"Good! If you should happen to see him when the train comes in, ask him to drop over here and smoke a pipe with me. Tell him I'm losing my carefully acquired cowboy accent since he went away, and I'd like to freshen it up a bit."

CHAPTER II.

The evening train came in from the West; and, at the outpouring of passengers from it, a man, whose air of prosperous independence was less in the grave, young-old face and the neatly fitting khaki service clothes than in the way in which he carried his shoulders, came diagonally across the grass-covered plaza to swing himself lightly over the railing of the hotel porch.

"Dick made motions as if you wanted to smoke a peace pipe with me," he said, dropping loosely into the chair which had been Maxwell's.

"Yes," Sprague assented; and then he went on to explain why. At the end of the explanation, Starbuck nodded.

"I reckon we can do it. Drop off the early-morning train at the cañon head, and take a chance on picking up a couple of broncs at Wimberley's ranch. But we could hoof it over from Angels in less than a quarter of the time it'll take us to ride up the river from Wimberley's."

"For reasons of my own, Billy, I don't want to 'hoof it,' as you say, from Angels." And therewith the matter rested.

At an early hour the following morning, an hour when the sun was just swinging clear over the far-distant blue horizon line of the Crosswater Hills marking the eastern limit of the great desert, two men dropped from the halted eastbound train at the Timanyoni Cañon water tank and made their way around the nearest of the hogbacks to the ranch house of one William Wimberley.

As Starbuck had predicted, two horses were obtainable, though the ranchman looked long and dubiously at the big figure of the government chemist before he was willing to risk even

the heaviest of the horses in his small remuda.

"I reckon you'll have ter set sort o' light in the saddle, mister," he said at the mounting; and then, apparently as an afterthought: "By gollies, I wouldn't have you fall over ag'inst me f'r a farm in God's country, stranger! Ef you was to live round here we'd call you Samson, and take up a c'lection fer the pore sufferin' Philistines. We shore would."

Sprague laughed good-naturedly as he followed Starbuck's lead toward the river.

"You say you want to follow the river?" said Starbuck when they had struck in between the precipitous hills among which the green flood of the Timanyoni made its way toward the cañon portal.

"Yes, if it is at all practicable. I'd like to get some idea of the lay of the land between this and the camp on the Mesquite."

"You'll get the idea, all right," agreed the superintendent's brother-in-law dryly; and, during the three-hour jaunt that followed, the saying was amply confirmed. There was no trail, and for the greater part of the way the river flowed between rocky hogbacks, with only the narrowest of boulder-strewn margins on either hand.

Time and again they were forced to dismount and to lead the horses around or over the natural obstructions; and once they were obliged to leave the river valley entirely, climbing and descending again by a circuitous route among the rugged hills.

It was late in the forenoon when they came finally into the region of upper basins, and, turning to the right, threaded a dry arroyo which brought them out upon the level-bottomed valley known as the Mesquite Mesa. It was not a mesa in the proper meaning of the term; it was rather a huge flat wash brought down from the hills by the torrenting of many floods. Here and there its sun-baked surface was cut and gashed by dry gullies all pointing toward the river, and each bearing silent

witness to the manner in which the mesa had been formed.

At a point well within this shut-in plateau Sprague dismounted, tossed his bridle reins to Starbuck, and went to examine the soil in the various gullies. Each dry ditch afforded a perfect section of the different strata, from the thin layer of sandy top soil to the underlying beds of coarse sandstone pebbles and gravel. Sprague kicked the edges from a dozen of the little ditches, secured a few handfuls of the soil, and came back shaking his head.

"I don't wonder that these people don't want to advertise their land, Billy," he said, climbing with a nimbleness astonishing in so huge a man to the back of his mount. "As they say down in Tennessee, you couldn't raise a fuss on it. Let's amble along and see what they're doing at the head works."

At the head of the wash, the valley of Mesquite Creek came in abruptly from the right. In the mouth of the valley they found the construction camp of the irrigation company, a scattered collection of shack sheds and tents, a corral for the working stock, and the usual filth and litter characterizing the temporary home of the "wop."

Across the valley mouth a huge earth-work was rising. It was the simplest form of construction known to the dam-building engineer; a mere heaping of earth and gravel moved by two-horse scrapers from the slopes of the contiguous hills on either hand. There was no masonry, no concrete, not even the thin core wall which modern engineering practice prescribes for the strengthening member in an earth embankment designed to retain any considerable body of water.

Moreover, there was no spillway. The creek, carrying at this season of the year its minimum flow, had been stopped off without an outlet; and the embankment upon which the force was heaping the scrapings from the hillsides was already retaining a good-sized lake formed by the checked water of the stream.

Starbuck and Sprague had drawn rein at the edge of the construction

camp, and they were not molested until Sprague took a flat black box from his pocket, opened it into a camera, and prepared to take a snapshot of the dam. At that, a man who had been lounging in the door of the camp commissary, a dark-faced, black-bearded giant of a man in brown duck and service leggings, crossed the camp street and threw up a hand in warning.

"Hey, there! Hold on—that don't go!" he shouted gruffly, striding up to stand squarely in the way of the camera. "You can't take any pictures on this job."

"Sorry," said Sprague, giving the intruder his most amiable smile, "but you were just a half second too late," and he closed the camera into its boxlike shape and dropped it into his pocket.

The black-bearded man advanced threateningly.

"This is company property, and you are trespassers," he snapped. "Give me that camera!"

Starbuck's right hand went softly under his coat, and stayed there, and his steady gray eyes took on the sleepy look that in his range-riding days had been a sufficient warning to those who knew him. Sprague lounged easily in his saddle and ignored the hand extended for the camera.

"You are Mr. Jennings, I take it," he said, as one who would temporize and gain time. "Fine dam you are building there."

"Give me that camera!"

Sprague met the angry eyes of the engineer, and smiled back into them.

"I'll take it under consideration," he said, half jocularly. "You'll give me a little time to think about it, won't you?"

Jennings' hand dropped to the butt of the huge revolver sagging at his hip.

"Not a minute!" he snarled. "Hand it over!"

Starbuck was closing up slowly on the opposite side of his companion's horse, a movement which he brought about by a steady knee pressure on the broncho's off shoulder. Jennings' fingers were closing around the grip of his pistol when the astounding thing hap-

pened. Without so much as a muscle-twitching of warning, Sprague's left hand shot out, the fingers grappled a huge breast hold on the engineer's coat and shirt front, and Jennings was snatched from his feet and flung, back down, across the horn of Sprague's saddle much as if his big body had been a bag of meal. Starbuck reached over, jerked the engineer's weapon from its holster, broke it to eject the cartridges, and flung it away.

"Now you can get down," said Sprague quietly; and, when he loosed the terrible clutch, Jennings slid from the saddle horn, and fell, cursing like a maniac.

"Stand still!" shouted Starbuck when the engineer bounded to his feet and started to run toward the commissary; and the weapon that made the command mandatory materialized suddenly from an inner pocket of the ex-cowman's khaki riding coat.

But the trouble, it seemed, was just fairly getting under way. Up from the embankment where the scrapers were dumping came two or three foremen armed with pick handles. The commissary was turning out its quota of rough-looking clerks and timekeepers; and a mob of the foreign laborers—the shift off duty—came pouring out of the bunk houses and shack shelters.

Sprague had unlimbered and focused his camera again, and was calmly taking snapshot after snapshot; of the dam, of the impounded lake, of the up-coming mob, and of the black-bearded man held hands up in the middle of the camp street. When he shut the box on the last of the exposures, he turned to Starbuck with a whimsical smile wrinkling at the corners of his eyes, saying:

"They don't seem to want us here, Billy. Shall we go?"

Starbuck shook the reins over the neck of his mount, and the two horses wheeled as one, and sprang away down the rough cart road leading to the end of the copper-mine spur above Angels. At the retreat, some one on the commissary porch began to pump a repeating rifle in the general direction of the pair, but no harm was done.

CHAPTER III.

Starbuck was the first to break the galloping silence when an intervening hill shoulder had cut off the backward view of the camp at the dam; and what he said was purely complimentary.

"You sure have got your nerve with you, and the punch to back it up," he chuckled. "I reckon I'm goin' to wake up in the night laughin' at the way you snatched that rustler out of his tracks and chucked him across the saddle. I'd give a heap to be able to do a thing like that. I sure would."

"Call it a knack," rejoined Sprague modestly. "You pick up a good many of those little tricks when you're training on the football squad. If you've ever thought of it, the human body is easier to handle, weight for weight, than any inanimate object could possibly be. That is one of the first things you learn in tackling on the football field."

They were jogging along slowly by this time, and had passed the copper-mine switch on the road leading to the station at Angels. Starbuck was not overcurious, but the experiences of the forenoon were a little puzzling. Why had his companion wished to take the long, hard ride up the valley of the Timanyoni? And why, again, had he taken the chance of a fight for the sake of securing a few snapshot pictures of the irrigation company's construction camp and dam? A third query hinged itself upon the decidedly inhospitable, not to say hostile, attitude of Jennings, the irrigation company's field officer. Why should he object so strenuously to the common sight-seer's habit of kodaking anything and everything in sight?

Starbuck was turning these things over in his mind when they reached Angels. Sprague was consulting his watch.

"I was wondering if we couldn't get this man Dickery at the town corral to take charge of these horses of ours until Wimberley can come and get them? That would make it possible for us to catch the eleven-thirty train for town."

Starbuck said it would be quite feasible; and when they had disposed of the

horses the train was whistling for the station. When they boarded it, it was Sprague's proposal that they postpone the midday meal in the diner in order to ride out on the rear platform of the observation car.

"We'll get in in time for a late luncheon at the hotel," was the way he put it; "and on as fine a day as this I like to ride out of doors and take in the scenery."

Starbuck acquiesced, and smiled as one well used to the scenery. Truly, the trip through the Timanyoni Cañon was one which usually brought the tourists crowding to the rear platform of the train; but until the morning of this purely sight-seeing jaunt he had been thinking that Maxwell's big friend was altogether superior to the scenic attractions.

Now, however, Sprague seemed greatly interested in the cañon passage. Again and again he called his companion's attention to the engineering difficulties which had been overcome in building the narrow pathway for the rails through the great gorge. Particularly he dwelt upon the stupendous cost of making the pathway.

"Yes," Starbuck agreed, "it sure did cost a heap of money. Dick says the thirty-six miles are bonded at one hundred thousand dollars a mile, and that didn't cover the cost of construction on some of the miles."

"But why did they put the grade so close to the river level?" persisted the expert as the foam from a mid-stream boulder breathed a misty breath on them when the train slid past. "Isn't there constant trouble from high water?"

"No, the Timanyoni's a pretty dependable creek," was Starbuck's answer. "Summer and winter it holds its own, with nothing like the variation you find in the Mississippi Valley rivers. An eight-foot rise is the biggest they've ever recorded at the High Line dam; so J. Montague Smith tells me."

"They are fixed to take care of that much of a rise at the High Line dam, are they?" queried Sprague.

"Oh, yes. I reckon they could take a bigger one than that if they had to.

That dam is built for keeps. Williams, who was the constructing engineer, says that the dam and plant will stand when the water of the river is pouring through the second-story windows of the power house."

"And that, you would say, would never happen?" said the expert thoughtfully. "If it should happen, your brother-in-law would have to build him a new railroad through this cañon, wouldn't he?"

"He sure would. The eight-foot rise I spoke of gave them a heap of trouble up here—washouts to burn!"

"What caused that rise, rains?"

"Rains and cloudbursts, in the season of the melting snows. It was just as Smith was turning heaven and earth upside down to get the dam completed; and for a little spell they thought they were going to be paralyzed."

"I want to meet that man Smith," said the expert, going off at a tangent, as his habit was. "Stillings, your friend, the lawyer, who has his offices next door to my laboratory, says he's a wonder."

"Smith is all right," was Starbuck's verdict. "He's a first-class fighting man, and he doesn't care much who knows it. He got rich out of that High Line fight, married old Colonel Baldwin's little peach of a daughter, and is layin' off to live happily ever afterward."

From that on, the rear-platform talk had to do chiefly with Mr. J. Montague Smith, and his plucky struggle with the hydro-electric trust which had tried unsuccessfully, as it seemed, to steal the High Line dam and water privilege. In due time, the train shot out of the gorge, and, after a dodging course among the park hills, came to the skirting of the High Line reservoir lake lying like a silver mirror in its setting of forested buttes and spurs.

At the lower end of the lake, where the white concrete dam stretched its massive rampart across the river gorge, the train halted for a moment in obedience to an interposing block signal. It was during the momentary stop that a handsome young fellow, with the healthy tan of the hill country browning

his frank, boyish face, came out of the near-by power house, ran up the embankment, and swung himself over the railing of the observation platform.

"Hello, John!" said Starbuck; and then he introduced the newcomer to his companion.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Sprague," said the young man, whose hearty hand-grip was an instant recommendation to the good graces of the big expert. "I've been hearing of you off and on all summer. It's a saying with us out here that any friend of Dick Maxwell's owns Brewster—or as much of it as he cares to make use of."

"I've been finding it that way, Mr. Smith," Sprague rejoined. And then: "We were just talking about you and your dam as we came along, Starbuck and I. You've got a pretty good head of water on, haven't you?"

"An unusually good head for this time of the year. The heavy storms we have been having in the eastern foothills account for it. Our power plant is working at normal load, and our ranchmen are all using water liberally in their late irrigating, and yet you see the quantity that is going over the spillway."

"Yes, I see," observed Sprague thoughtfully. And when the train began to move onward: "With this big reservoir behind you, I suppose a sudden flood couldn't hurt you, Mr. Smith?"

The young man with the healthy tan on his clean-cut face promptly showed his good business sense.

"We think we've got a pretty safe installation, but we're not anxious to try it out merely for the satisfaction of seeing how much it would stand," was the conservative reply.

Sprague looked up curiously from his solid planting in the biggest of the platform folding chairs.

"And yet, three days ago, Mr. Smith, you said in the presence of witnesses that a ten-foot rise wouldn't endanger your dam or your power plant," he put in shrewdly.

Mr. J. Montague Smith, secretary and treasurer of the Timanyoni High Line Company, was plainly taken unawares.

"How the dev—" he began; and then he tried again. "Pardon me, Mr. Sprague. You hit me when I wasn't looking for it. I believe I did say something like that. In fact, I've said similar things a good many times."

"But not in exact feet and inches, I hope," said Sprague, with a show of mild concern. "These exactnesses are what murder us, Mr. Smith. Now, I presume if somebody should come to you to-day and threaten to turn another ten feet of river loose on you, you'd object, wouldn't you?"

"We certainly should—object most strenuously!"

"Yet, if that person were so minded, he might quote you as having said that ten additional feet wouldn't hurt you."

The young treasurer laughed a trifle uneasily.

"I can't believe that anybody would make a bit of well-meant boasting like that an excuse for—but it's altogether absurd, you know. Your case is unsupposable. Nobody pushes the button for the rains or the cloudburst storms. When you introduce me to the fellow who really has the making of the weather in the Timanyoni headwaters, I'll be very careful of what I say to him."

"Just so," said the expert quietly; and then a long-continued blast of the locomotive whistle announced the approach to Brewster.

Sprague took leave of his latest acquaintance at the station entrance, where a trim, high-powered motor car, driven by an exceedingly pretty young woman, was waiting for Smith.

"I am a soil expert, as you may have heard, Mr. Smith," said Sprague at parting; "and I am interested at the moment in alluvial washes—the detritus brought down from the highlands by the rivers. One of these days I may call upon you for a little information and help."

"Command me," said the young financier, with another of the hearty handgrips; and then he climbed in beside the pretty young woman and was driven away.

CHAPTER IV.

Sprague was unusually silent during the tardy luncheon shared with Starbuck in the Topaz café; and Starbuck, who never had much to say unless he was pointedly invited, was correspondingly speechless. Afterward, with a word of caution to his table companion not to mention the morning's adventure to any one, Sprague went to his laboratory; to test the specimens of soil gathered on the Mesquite Mesa, Starbuck supposed.

But the supposition was wrong. What Mr. Calvin Sprague busied himself with during the afternoon was the careful development of the film taken from his pocket camera, and the printing of several sets of pictures therefrom. These prints he placed in his pocket notebook, and the book and its inclosures went with him when, after the evening meal, at which he had, somehow, missed both Maxwell and Starbuck, he climbed the three flights of stairs in the Tribune Building and presented himself at the door of Editor Kendall's den.

Kendall was glad to see him, or, at least, he said he was; and, waving him to a chair at the desk end, produced a box of rather dubious-looking cigars, at which the visitor shook his head despondently.

"You'd say I was the picture of health, wouldn't you, Kendall; and you wouldn't believe me if I were to tell you that I am smoking a great deal too much," he said, with a quizzical smile that was on the verge of turning into a grin.

The editor was not fooled. As a matter of fact, it was an exceedingly difficult matter to fool the tired-eyed tyrant of the *Tribune* editorial rooms.

"Cut it out," he said, with his mirthless laugh. "You wouldn't expect to find fifty-cent Rienas in a newspaper shop—any more than I'd expect you to climb up here with a news story for me. Smoke your own cigars, and be damned to you!" And in sheer defiance he lighted one of his own dubious monstrosities while Sprague was chuckling

and passing his pocket case of fat, black Maduros.

"Perhaps I *have* a news story for you," said Sprague. "Cast your eye over these;" and he threw out the bunch of lately made photographs.

The editor went over the collection carefully, and at the end of the inspection asked: "Well, what's the answer?"

"The construction camp of the Mesquite Land and Irrigation Company at about half past ten this forenoon. The held-up man is Jennings, posed by Billy Starbuck, who was kindly holding a gun on him for me. The people running are Jennings' workmen, coming to help him obliterate us. The water is the irrigation lake; the heap of dirt is the dam."

"Still, I don't quite grasp the news value," said Kendall doubtfully. "Why should Jennings wish to obliterate you?"

"Because I was taking pictures on his job. He was unreasonable enough to demand my camera, and to make the sham bad man's break of laying his hand on his gun."

The editor studied the pictures long and thoughtfully.

"You've got something up your sleeve, Mr. Sprague. What is it?" he asked, after the considerate pause.

Sprague drew his chair closer; and for five minutes the city editor, who had come in for a word with his chief, forbore to break in upon the low-toned, earnest conference which was going on at the managing editor's desk. At the end of it, however, he heard Kendall say: "I'll get Monty Smith on the wire, and if he coincides with you, we'll take a hand in this. I more than half believe you're right; but you'll admit that it sounds rather incredible. The *Tribune*'s motto is, 'All the news that is news'; but we don't want to be classed among the 'yellows.'"

"You run no risk in the present instance," was Sprague's confident assurance. "Of course, there is no direct evidence. If there were, the case would be promptly taken to the courts. As a matter of fact, I'm hoping that Mr. Smith will take it to the courts as it

stands. But, in any event, an appeal to the public will do no harm."

"All right. We'll see what Smith says," said Kendall; and then the patient city editor had his inning.

Leaving the Tribune Building, the chemistry expert went to the nearest telephone and called for the house number of Mr. Robert Stillings, the attorney who served locally for the railroad company, and was also counsel for the High Line people. It was the young lawyer himself who answered the phone.

"This is Sprague," said the downtown caller. "How busy are you this evening?"

The answer was apparently satisfactory, since the big man went on: "All right. I wish you would arrange to meet me in the lobby of the Topaz. Catch the next car if it won't hurry you too much. You'll do it? Thank you. Good-by."

Fifteen minutes later, the government man, writing a letter at one of the desks in the hotel lobby, looked up to greet his summoned visitor, a keen-eyed, self-contained young man, whose reputation as a fearless fighter of just causes was already spreading from the little intermountain city of his adoption and becoming State wide.

"I'm here," said Stillings briefly; and Sprague rose and drew him aside into one of the alcoves.

For some little time after they had drawn their chairs together, Sprague held the floor, talking earnestly and exhibiting a set of the snapshot pictures. Stillings listened attentively, examining the pictures by the aid of a small pocket magnifier. But when Sprague finished, he was shaking his head dubiously, unconsciously following the example set by the *Tribune* editor.

"We have nothing to go on, Mr. Sprague, as you, yourself, admit. These people are well within their legal rights. As you probably know, there is no statutory provision in this State requiring the builders of a dam to conform to any particular plan of construction; and, as a matter of fact, there are dozens of dams just like this one—a mere earth

embankment without masonry of any kind."

"Do you mean to say that the entire Timanyoni Valley can be endangered by a structure like this, and that the property owners who are imperiled have no legal recourse?" demanded the expert.

"Recourse, yes; after the fact. If the dam should give way and cause damage, the irrigation company would be liable."

"Humph!" snorted the big-bodied one half contemptuously. "Law is one of the few things that I've never dabbled in. What you say amounts to this: If I find a man training a cannon on my house, I have no right to stop him. I can only try to collect damages after the gun has gone off and ripped a hole through my property. I could make a better law than that myself!"

Stillings was staring thoughtfully through the opposite window at the lights in the railroad building across the plaza.

"There are times, Mr. Sprague, when we all feel that way; crises which seem to call for something in the way of extra-judicial proceedings," he admitted. And then: "Have you told Maxwell about this?"

"Not specifically. Dick has troubles of his own just now. He has had enough of them this summer to turn his hair gray, as you know. I've been hoping that this latest move of the enemy could be blocked without dragging him into it."

Stillings turned quickly. "That is the frankest thing you've said this evening. Is it another move of the enemy—the New Yorkers?"

Sprague spread his hands, and his big shoulders went up in a shrug.

"You have just as much incriminating evidence as I have. How does it strike you?"

The attorney shook his head doubtfully, again unconsciously following Editor Kendall's lead.

"It doesn't seem possible!" he protested. "Think of the tremendous consequences involved—outside of the crippling of the railroad. The Short Line wouldn't be the only sufferer in case of a dam break in the Mesquite. The

entire valley would be flood-swept, and our High Line dam—" He stopped abruptly and half rose to his feet. "Good Lord, Sprague, the breaking of the High Line dam would mean death and destruction without end!"

Sprague had found a cigar in a forgotten pocket, and was calmly lighting it. Though he did not tell Stillings so, the argument had finally gotten around into the field toward which he had been pushing it from the first.

"Three days ago your High Line treasurer, Mr. J. Montague Smith, declared in the presence of witnesses—it was right here in this hotel lobby, and I happened to overhear it—that a ten-foot rise in the river, which, as you know, would submerge and sweep away miles of the railroad track in the cañon, would by no means endanger his dam. There you are, Mr. Stillings. Now fish or cut bait."

"Great Scott, what could Smith have been thinking of!" ejaculated the lawyer.

"It was a bit of loyal brag, as he admitted to Starbuck and me on the train this afternoon. But he said it; and, what is more, he said it to—Jennings!"

This time the attorney's start carried him out of his chair and stood him upon his feet.

"I shall have to see Smith at once," he said hurriedly. "Still, I can't believe that these New York stock pirates would authorize any such murderous thing as this!"

"Authorize murder or violence? Of course not. Big business never does that. What it does is to put a man into the field, telling him in general terms the end that is to be accomplished. They'd turn blue under their finger nails if you should charge them with murder."

"But that is what this would amount to—cold-blooded murder!"

"Hold on a minute," objected Sprague. "Let's apply a little scientific reasoning. Suppose this thing has been accurately figured out, engineering-wise. Suppose that, by careful computation, it has been found that a certain

quantity of water, turned loose at the mouth of Mesquite Valley, would produce a flood of a certain height in the full length of Timanyoni Cañon—say, ten or twelve feet—sufficient to obliterate thirty-five or forty miles of the railroad track. Below its path of the greatest destruction it comes out into your High Line reservoir lake, with some miles farther to go, and a greatly enlarged area over which to diffuse itself."

Stillings was nodding intelligence. "I see," he said. "Ten feet in the cañon wouldn't necessarily mean ten feet at Smith's dam."

"No; but at the same time Smith is on record as having said that ten feet wouldn't endanger his dam or the power plant. So there you are again."

Stillings walked the length of the alcove twice, with his head down and his hands in his pockets, before he stopped in front of the expert to say: "You've half convinced me, Mr. Sprague. If we could get the barest shred of evidence that these people are building a dam which isn't intended to hold—"

"There spoke the lawyer again," laughed Sprague. "If you had the evidence, what would you do?"

"Institute legal proceedings at once."

"And how long would it take you to get action?"

"Oh, that would depend upon the nature of the evidence I had to offer, of course."

Sprague laughed again; derisively this time. "Yes, I thought so; and while you were getting out your wrists and monkeying around—do you know what that piece of cañon track cost, Mr. Stillings? I was told to-day that three million dollars wouldn't replace it—to say nothing of what it would mean to the railroad company to have its through line put out of business indefinitely. No; if you mean to—"

The interruption was the intrusion into the alcove of a big, hard-faced man who was fumbling in his pocket for a paper.

"Hello, Harding!" said Stillings; and then jokingly: "What brings the re-

spected sheriff of Timanyoni County charging in upon us at this time of night?"

"It's a warrant," said the sheriff, half in apology. And then to Sprague: "I hate like the mischief to trouble you, Mr. Sprague, but duty's duty."

Sprague smiled up at the big man. "Tell us about it, Mr. Harding. You needn't bother to read the warrant."

"It's that scrap you had with Jennings up at the Mesquite this morning. He's swore out a warrant against you for assault and battery."

"And you are going to lock me up overnight? I fancy that is what he'd like to have you do."

"Not me," said the sheriff good-naturedly. "I got Judge MacFarland out o' bed and made him come down to his office. I'm goin' to ask you to walk around there with me, just to let me out of it whole. I've fixed it with the judge so you won't have to give bail."

"I'll go with you," Stillings offered; and a few minutes later, in the magistrate's office, the government man had

bound himself on his own recognizance to appear in court the next morning to answer the charge against him.

On the sidewalk in front of the justice shop, Stillings reverted to the more pressing matter.

"I'm going to see Smith before I sleep if I have to drive out to the Baldwin Ranch to find him," he said. "In the meantime, Mr. Sprague, if you can devise any scheme by which we can get a legal hold on these fellows—anything that will serve as an excuse for our asking that an injunction be issued—"

"That would come before Judge Watson, wouldn't it?" Sprague broke in.

"Yes."

"See Kendall, of the *Tribune*, about that. From what he told me a couple of hours ago, I should say that your petition for an injunction would be only a crude loss of time. We'll try and think of a better way, or, at least, a more effective way. Good night, and don't omit to throw the gaff into Smith good and hard."

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE AUGUST 23RD.



POSTERITY AND COMMERCIALISM

CHARLES D. HILLES, secretary to the president, says the funniest advertisement he ever saw was stuck up in front of a grocery store on a side street in Cincinnati. It read thus:

Twins are come to me for the third time. This time a boy and a girl. I beseech my friends and patrons to support me stoutly.



THE UNSYMPATHETIC AUDIENCE

ANDREW LIPSCOMB, who practices law before the courts of Maryland, was trying his first case before a judge named Merrick. Lipscomb, wishing to impress the judge, was, in the language of the bar, "right lippy" in his remarks to the eminent gentleman. Finally, Merrick lost patience, and exclaimed:

"Sit down! Sit down, sir! If you don't sit down, I'll fine you for contempt of court."

Lipscomb sat down, but turned to a young lawyer beside him, and remarked in an undertone:

"That's the crustiest, most opinionated old judge I ever saw. I'll show him where he gets off. He's an old fool."

"If you talk like that, I'll beat you up!" replied the young lawyer. "He's my father."

"How sad!" said Lipscomb smoothly. "How sad!"

"In Dutch"

By Edmund Stover

Author of "Sing Lee's Bonanza Mine," Etc.

The isolated prairie town of Star Corners gets something new to talk about when the Dutchman arrives as factotum of the Prairie Plover Hotel and spends most of his time sitting on the veranda with his feet on the rail. He looked laziness personified, but there was plenty of energy in "Dutchy" when the psychological moment arrived.

THERE was nothing extraordinary about Bill Ginn's clerk, save a pair of painfully bowed legs. Mr. Ginn professed to have lassoed "Dutchy"—no untutored tongue dared venture his true patronymic—on Tom Watson's ranch, installing him at once as factotum in his Prairie Plover Hotel in Star Corners. Rancher Watson corroborated this in part. Dutchy, he said, had appeared at his place looking for work several weeks previously, and, being in need of a man, he had given him a position; but it soon developed that the Teuton had never been condemned through Adam's original sin to till the soil.

"He didn't have sense enough to bed the cows," explained the rancher, "so, thinking he'd do for a hotel clerk, I turned him over to Bill."

As the acquisition of Dutchy had taken place soon after Landlord Ginn had sustained heavy loss on a race between his thoroughbred, Riven Rock, and White Raven, the Lenox mare, it was feared by his friends that the financial reverse had weighed too heavily upon the hotel man's mind.

Dutchy was about thirty years of age, of stocky build, and stolid, clean-shaven countenance. On his head lay a premonition of coming baldness, hidden during most of his waking hours under

a German peasant cap. He wore a suit of cheap jeans, whose tight-fitting trousers accentuated the peculiar architecture of his nether limbs. Few English words tripped rhythmically off Dutchy's tongue, and those who attempted conversation with him could glean little more than that he had been born in Wiesbaden, and had been in the United States only six months. When he endeavored to impart further information speech failed him, and futile stuttering would send him into a rage.

"*Sie still!*" he snarled, when Mrs. Ida Brown, Star Corners' most persistent gossip, was angling for his life's history. "Don't told me so much a kves-tion. *Zu viel ist genug.*"

Thirty times a day thereafter Mrs. Brown expressed her firm conviction that Dutchy was "crazy as a bug," adding the cheerful prediction that "one of these days he'll break loose and murder half the town."

What enveloped Dutchy in an air of mystery from the time of his arrival in Star Corners was the manner in which his antipathy to work corrected the same trait in his employer. For years Bill Ginn—boniface, gambler, trigger manipulator—had been stranger to more strenuous toil than shuffling a pack of cards—save when he engaged in physical argument. On one of the latter oc-

casions, after a busy five minutes' discussion with knives, he had spent many weeks in a hospital; but when he emerged he fared straight to the town cemetery, and did a hornpipe on the grave of his enemy.

Generally, Ginn let the Prairie Plover Hotel run itself, unless the thrifty Mrs. Ginn could spare time from its kitchen to look after affairs in the office; but, after the coming of Dutchy, the landlord put on an air of great energy. He even went twice a day to meet the trains, welcoming prospective patrons and carrying their lighter luggage the two blocks that separated the hotel from the railroad station. Meanwhile Dutchy, his feet upon the veranda railing at the Prairie Plover, would stoically puff at a long pipe while assimilating the news conveyed by a Wiesbaden paper. At times, when Mr. Ginn's enthusiasm was unequal to the tasks which devolve upon a hotel clerk, Mrs. Ginn would meet the trains; but Dutchy never stirred from his comfortable perch on the veranda, nor put aside his pipe, no matter what the stress of official duty.

That any one could so impose upon Bill Ginn was a miracle that Star Corners spent some weeks attempting to dissect. By some the theory was advanced that Dutchy was a distant relative of Mrs. Ginn, whose forbears also had come from the land of *Hoch der Kaiser*. This the landlord's wife indignantly denied. Other possible solutions were thrashed out, but none proved entirely satisfactory.

As the weeks ran on the plot thickened. Dutchy—note the clearness of Mrs. Brown's vision—developed two manias wholly at variance with his inherent inclination. One was to race up and downstairs three steps at a time; the other to shoulder a gun and go on long hunting trips. For the latter excursions he frequently selected hours either before dawn or after dusk, when there was no possibility save that—again the words of the seeress—"in the noddle of a fool Dutchman," the feathered game would be awing. Often he would return from these jaunts perspiring as though he had been pursued

by a specter, but he was never known to bring back a single duck or prairie grouse.

As for scurrying up and downstairs, that became a sight so common to Star Corners urchins that after a time it no longer excited their comment. Back of the Prairie Plover Hotel was an out-of-door approach to a second-story porch. Day after day Dutchy could be seen negotiating this ascent three steps at a time. Sometimes he continued this violent exertion a full half hour without a pause.

In an isolated prairie town like Star Corners, so eccentric a character would have provided a perennial theme for theoretical discourse; but eventually the approach of the return field day arranged by the rival sporting men of Star Corners and Lenox diverted the minds of the townspeople. These field days were of semiannual or quarterly occurrence, and had resolved themselves into mere betfests between high-stake gamblers, whose lead was followed by the piking small fry. Every scheme that either clique could evolve for the defrauding of its rival was put into practice. Running horses, wrestlers, baseball players, foot racers were imported, and gradually the competition had resolved itself into one as to which could use the better judgment in employing outside talent and skill in masquerading it under the guise of mediocrity.

Bill Ginn was the leader of the Star Corners sportsmen; Joe Gantz directed the Lenox operations. Upon this twain fell the task of plotting the various coups designed to separate one town or the other from its ready coin. For the approaching field day Ginn had strengthened the Star Corners baseball nine, had brought in a horse from one of the Western circuits to take the measure of White Raven, the Lenox mare, and had under cover a wrestler who, he boasted openly, would prove to be the master of Lon McGrew, the Lenox giant. Hank Elliot and the several other "big-money" betters who were in Ginn's confidence seemed unusually light of heart as the field day drew near. Born of their cheerfulness, a conviction

pervaded all Star Corners and its environs that at last Lenox was to be wiped off the financial map.

Lenox had been selected in its regular turn to be the scene of the contests. In the forenoon of the all-important day virtually every vehicle in Star Corners, crowded with male inhabitants of various ages, was wending its way across the ten miles of prairie that separated the two towns. Those unable to obtain seats in the wheeled conveyances started early to traverse the long route on foot; for, though the Dakota Central boasted two passenger trains a day, the one eastward bound did not pass through Star Corners until too late to make it useful on a Lenox field day.

Hank Elliot's automobile had taken on Landlord Ginn and his closest advisers in front of the Prairie Plover, and was about to chug away when an unexpected crisis arose. Dutchy had decided that he would go along.

"We can't take you," declared Bill Ginn angrily. "Who d'ye think'd run the hotel?"

"*Ich weis nicht,*" returned Dutchy. "Shtill I go by Lennocks."

"But I tell you you can't go. Now, shut up about it."

"All *recht*," acquiesced Dutchy, "aber I quit my chob."

Further argument that crescendoed a block up and down the street resulted finally in a triumph for the Teuton, and Ginn, muttering maledictions, made room for him in the car.

Thus the Prairie Plover's clerk got to Lenox that day, and mingled with the crowds attracted thither by the contests. The Lenox baseball grounds occupied a vacant square just off the main thoroughfare, and here all athletic issues were decided.

At one side was a cinder path for the sprinters, and between this course and the baseball diamond a raised platform served as a stage for the announcer, as well as for the Lenox Silver Cornet Band.

Dutchy wandered about at will, seemingly little impressed by the exciting scenes that were being enacted; yet even to his stolid mind it must have

been apparent as the day waned that the tide of battle was going heavily against Star Corners.

Black Bess had defeated Ginn's borrowed thoroughbred; the purchased talent that had strengthened the visiting baseball nine had proved inadequate against that added surreptitiously by Joe Gantz to the Lenox team; the invaders' wrestler was but a weakling in the hands of the giant Lon McGrew. There alone remained the foot race, and the Star Corners small fry were gloomily discussing with one another the slim possibility that Ed Huntley could outrun the trim-built Cantrell, whom Lenox had brought in from nobody knew where. These misgivings fell upon Dutchy's ears wherever he turned, but he gave them little heed.

The last put-out had been made by the Lenox first baseman, and with a seven-to-two score in its favor, the home team had found it unnecessary to go to the bat in the ninth inning. The crowd betook itself from the side lines to the cinder path, where preparations for the race between Huntley and Cantrell were carried forward quickly. Soon the two sprinters appeared upon the course, clad in their running gear, and, after a brief warming-up dash, lined up to await the starter's pistol. Bill Ginn and his lieutenants circulated in the crowd, shouting brazen defiance.

"Even money Ed Huntley can lick Cantrell at a hundred yards—and we've got a man with us 't can beat Huntley."

"Dutchy, you'd better take your boss home," suggested Oliver Kendall, president of the Bank of Lenox facetiously to Ginn's clerk. "His head has been bumped so hard to-day that he's gone crazy with the heat."

Dutchy grinned understandingly, and tapped his own cranium in appreciation.

But notwithstanding all the noise, the wagering on the foot race was not heavy. Those in charge of the "big money" from Star Corners pinched their wagers to a few random tens and twenties. Where larger sums were offered by Cantrell backers, an argument was precipitated, and by the time the start of the race had been effected Hank

Elliot reported to his chief that the fund had been depleted by only a couple of hundred dollars.

The race itself was a farce. Cantrell quickly jumped into the lead, and remained there throughout, running so palpably under restraint that the men of Lenox marveled that even their loss-crazed visitors could not perceive the deception. While the victorious home contingent was celebrating the downfall of Huntley, Bill Ginn mounted the band stand.

"Gents," he shouted, waving a handful of bank notes, "your runner has beat our man Huntley, but we told you we've got a man faster'n Huntley. Maybe we're wrong, but we think we're right; and, anyhow, we've got the noiseless cash to back our judgment."

"Where is your man? Show him to us," demanded Joe Gantz, the Lenox generalissimo.

"He's right here, gents," Ginn replied. "Ho, Dutchy!"

The clerk of the Prairie Plover Hotel disentangled himself from the crowd, and mounted the steps of the band stand to a place beside his employer.

"Here he is—look him over," chortled Ginn. "He ain't much for beauty, but I'll bet a thousand dollars he can trim your man Cantrell in a foot race."

Dutchy doffed his German cap, and grinned vacuously. There was something so ludicrous about his squat figure, the bowed legs accentuated by their tight-fitting jeans, that the crowd guffawed delightedly. Then a stampede toward Bill Ginn ensued. Banker Kendall, after one gloating look at the roll of bills in Ginn's hands, sped with undignified haste in the opposite direction—toward the imposing corner block whose vaults safeguarded his fortune.

Silas Elkins was the official honest man of Lenox—stakeholder alike for host and guest. In appearance he was a replica of all the deacons in the world—tall, gaunt, sanctimonious, his lamblike eyes matching the soiled gray of his tufted chin. A notebook and a valise were his insignia of office; and, taking his place on the platform beside Bill Ginn, he jotted in the former a

notation on each wager, and deposited in the latter the equivalent currency. Never before had "Honest Si" experienced so busy a time as he put in this day; never before had such a speculative frenzy seized upon the men of the two towns.

For fifteen minutes Bill Ginn laid off his "roll" against all comers. His lieutenants foraged for Lenox money in the crowd that packed itself around the band stand. During all the furor Dutchy stood grinning amiably down upon the crowd, and one glance at him nerved many a man from Lenox wavering on the verge of a wager. Filling his long pipe, he puffed contentedly between placid smiles.

At the end of twenty minutes Ginn's taunts were no longer meeting with response.

"Call out the runners," directed "Long John" Oliver, the master of events.

"Hold on! Wait a moment!" cried an excited voice. Banker Kendall, carrying a canvas sack, fought his way through the crowd, and mounted the steps to Ginn's side.

"Five hundred dollars that Cantrell beats the Dutchman," he panted.

"You're on," said Ginn.

"Make it a thousand."

"You're on. Any more?"

The banker wilted, and a sudden suspicion turned his gaze to where Cantrell, enveloped in a heavy blanket, was pacing up and down the cinder track.

"If you've got him in the can, Ginn, he'll never leave this town alive," declared Kendall savagely.

"Bring on your Star Corners runner," interrupted Long John Oliver, and Bill Ginn led the docile Dutchy down the steps and into the baseball clubhouse used as a dressing room by those engaged in the contests.

When they emerged ten minutes later, what a transformation had been wrought! As Dutchy passed through the crowd a murmur of surprise arose; surprise gave way to consternation, as the men who had wagered on Cantrell looked upon the figure of Bill Ginn's clerk.

It was no longer Dutchy, the ludicrous roustabout, but a stockily built athlete, trained to the minute. On those pitifully bowed legs that showed beneath his running trunks, great muscles bulged against a skin bronzed with tan. Around ankles and instep coiled tiny cords, like knotted angleworms, that expanded and contracted with each spring of his foot. He had put aside his German air and vacuous grin, and those who now looked upon the clear blue eyes and clean-cut jaw wondered why he had seemed before so stolid and ridiculous.

Ginn and his charge moved to the head of the course, and Dutchy waved an imperious hand to the police to clear a way. When the crowd had moved back from the cinder path, he sprinted down the hundred yards in easy, graceful strides. Those mightily muscled legs moved rhythmically as pistons, and the little gnarled cords at his ankles expanded and recoiled with a snappy unison that gave him the appearance of one treading on springs.

After Dutchy's warming-up sprint and the starter's call to the two runners to toe the mark, Bill Ginn drew his clerk to one side.

"You know *me*, don't you?" he asked suggestively.

"Yah—sure—vy?" Dutchy questioned in turn.

Ginn tapped his right hip pocket. "Because I want to remind you that it's just ten miles to the State line, and if you lose this race you'd better keep right on going till you're across, and at about the same time you'd better be beating the speed record for bullets."

That this warning was wholly uncalled for was apparent five minutes later, when the crack of the starter's pistol was heard, and the two gladiators sprang forward. Before a third of the course had been traversed Dutchy was looking backward over his shoulder and laughing at the straining Cantrell. With those long, graceful strides, that shamed by comparison his outclassed rival's frantic straining, he increased his lead without effort and crossed the finishing line a full fifteen feet to the good.

What woe in Lenox that night! And Star Corners, surprised by the morrow's dawn with its exultation yet unspent, took another holiday, and continued to whoop it up.

Become a hero on the moment, Dutchy graduated from menial to guest in Bill Ginn's caravansary. His familiar chair on the veranda of the Prairie Plover was now graced by a flashily attired gentleman of leisure, whose shirt bosom was haloed by a large, white stone. Patent leather graced the feet that found their cherished resting place on the railing; and to chair and occupant, as to an enthroned joss, the town bowed down in worship.

On the day following the race, Landlord Ginn made his guest a generous offer.

"Dutchy, I'll sell you a half interest in the hotel for your share of the winnings," he proposed. "It's worth double that, but we want to keep you here."

The reformed clerk cogitated this for a time.

"*Nein*," he replied at last. "I shtick here till der coom-back race—den I go."

"What come-back race?"

At the cost of much effort, Dutchy explained. Lenox—take it from him—might moan and tear its hair, but it would not give up the ghost over a single trouncing. Even at that moment it was more than probable that Lenox was plotting vengeance—that its emissaries were still-hunting throughout the Middle West for a sprinter fast enough to avenge Dutchy's deed. As soon as they had found him, along would come a challenge for a return match.

"And when they do find him," remarked Ginn shrewdly, "we'll fool 'em. We won't race."

"*Ja, ja, aber Herr Ginn, sie verstehen nicht!*"

Dutchy enjoyed a chuckle all to himself, then launched into such a maelstrom of speech that Jake Spiegelman, the butcher, was summoned hurriedly to sort out what he was saying.

Confidentially, through the interpreter, the sprinter elucidated. Herr Ginn had been told by the New York

friend who recommended Dutchy to him that the latter could outfoot any runner likely to be matched against him in the Western country. But the New York sport had not told all—far from it.

He had neglected to mention, for instance, that Dutchy's real name was Franz Adolf Fogelbaum—a name to conjure with in the old country, for had not its bearer been for five years champion short-distance runner of the German empire, and competed to his honor and glory against the very best sprinters in all Europe?

Much more he revealed concerning himself. If he were only in Wiesbaden instead of Star Corners he could exhibit a marvelous collection of medals and other trophies won before he had entered the professional ranks. There was the Kaiser Wilhelm tankard, for which more than one hundred men, including an all-British team, had competed. And in the preceding year—

Landlord Ginn tossed sleeplessly on his bed that night, haunted by the fear that Lenox, after all, might remain crushed 'neath the ignominy of defeat.

But Dutchy possessed the gift of true prophecy. After three weeks of quiescence, as though appalled by calamity, Lenox awakened, blinked its eyes, and ventured a shrill cock-a-doodle-do. Couched in defiant terms came a challenge from Joe Gantz, who, employing the editorial "we," announced that a fund of five thousand dollars had been deposited in the hands of Honest Si Elkins on the supposition that one Charley McEwen, sprinter, could run rings around any Dutchman, Swede, or Hot-tentot that Star Corners might produce, provided Star Corners deposited with said Elkins an equal sum.

Without awaiting the report of "scouts" sent to learn the identity of McEwen—of course, it was argued, the name was fictitious—Ginn called his satellites into conference, and within the hour Hank Elliot was on his way to Lenox to accept the challenge. And when Elliot returned with the information that the Gantz crowd had offered to double the bet, Ginn pinched himself to prove it was not a dream.

There was a withdrawing of funds from the Bank of Star Corners; Rancher Watson hastened the shipment of a trainload of steers to Omaha, though market conditions were far from favorable; war bags came forth from secret repositories, and soon Elliot was scurrying by auto to reach Lenox before Joe Gantz could change his mind. Dutchy himself contributed a generous portion of his recently earned reward, to be wagered upon his own chances.

To add to the general elation, the spies sent into the enemy's country returned with news that the pseudo McEwen was unquestionably a Sioux City sprinter named Caldwell, who, though much fleeter of foot than the vanquished Cantrell, was yet far from being a world beater. A telegram to the sporting editor of a Sioux City daily brought the further information that no runner who could shade ten seconds need have fear of Caldwell.

The signing of articles for the race took place on a Wednesday, and it was decided to bring off the event the following Saturday. Lenox, as the challenger, exercised its right to have the contest decided on its own course.

Dutchy, no longer put to the necessity of racing up and downstairs, or pursuing phantom ducks before dawn as a training curriculum, underwent a final work-out on Thursday on the Star Corners cinder track. Several hundred men and boys watched him speed gracefully down the hundred-yard course, and three stop watches clicked at ten and a half seconds as he passed the finishing line. It was a marvelous effort, for to the veriest novice it must have been apparent that he had much in reserve.

"See that the Lenox bunch hear about this," Bill Ginn gleefully suggested to Manager Potts, of the telephone exchange. "It can't do any harm—the money's up."

On Friday Dutchy resorted to dieting, and laid aside his pipe. A thin slice of toast comprised his Saturday morning breakfast—the sum total of his gormandizing, he explained, on the day of a race. Throughout the forenoon hours he lolled in his chair on the Prai-

rie Plover veranda, viewing the hegira Lenoxward—a picture of unconcern that exasperated even the iron-nerved Ginn.

"Dutchy, there'll be twenty thousand dollars riding on you to-day," the landlord remarked.

"Oh, dot ain't such a much," replied Dutchy airily. "Once by der old country—"

"Blast the old country!" exclaimed Ginn, turning away irritably.

But nothing could mar the Dutchman's calm. He watched with unconcern the preparations for his departure in Hank Elliot's auto car; during the ten-mile journey spouted fractured English on the most trivial themes—all save that which was keeping two towns at racking tension; looked with utter indifference upon the throng that jammed the Lenox athletic grounds, crowded every near-by roof, and even hung in clusters at the tops of telephone posts—such sights no longer stirred the blood of Franz Adolf Fogelbaum.

Bill Ginn had timed his arrival in Lenox to insure against a tedious wait. Already the crowd was banked against the ropes that lined the cinder course, and Long John Oliver, with a score of deputies, was striving to hold it back. The new Lenox champion—"McEwen," they still called him, and Star-Corners let it go at that—was on the track, pacing nervously up and down. Dutchy, when he had donned his racing regalia and come upon the course, gave never a glance in the direction of his rival.

Each man in turn sprinted the hundred yards at half speed as a preliminary to the sharper struggle. Then Master of Ceremonies Oliver called them to the starting point.

Bill Ginn laid a hand upon Dutchy's shoulder.

"I hope nothing happens to you, my boy," he said.

"Whatever it happens or didn't," returned Dutchy imperturbably, "I vin."

There was some "jockeying" for the advantage, but when at last the crack of

the starter's pistol sounded, the two gladiators were off to a perfect start. Like a team they raced along the course, each straining to the ultimate of his speed, and neither seeming able to gain the slightest advantage. The crowd watched with tense anxiety their bobbing heads—watched so silently that the footfalls of the straining pair upon the cinder path smote loudly upon the ear.

On toward the finish of the short dash sped the contestants, still racing as a team. But hark! Why that sudden groan of execration—that wild, exultant shout? With the tape only five yards away, Dutchy has stumbled, and been thrown out of his stride. It is too late to recover, and as they flash past the judges, daylight is showing between the pseudo McEwen and the Star Corners champion.

But why do they keep on running? Out beyond the crowd a high-power motor car, already cranked up, is getting under way. For this the two sprinters dash, as though it were the single goal of all their desperate striving. They reach the car, leap upon the steps, and swing into the tonneau just as it springs forward in quick response to its driver's demand.

Dutchy, standing up in the tonneau, waves a hand at the gaping throng.

"Fare ye well, lads," he shouts, in a beautiful Irish brogue. "We're off to the Shtate line—an' it's only tin miles away."

Bill Ginn pulled up for want of breath after a brief, futile pursuit, and returned a smoking revolver to his hip pocket.

"I'd give a thousand dollars for a rifle!" he affirmed fervently to Hank Elliot, who, puffing and blowing, had been racing at his side. "Look at the thieving cutthroat waving his hand at us."

"Who's that fellow driving the car? I can't make him out," gasped Elliot.

"Huh, don't you know *him*?" shrilled an urchin voice. "That's Honest Si Elkins."

There is another good story about Star Corners coming later. It is called "A Coward for Revenue."

A Chat With You

IT is well known that prophecy is a thankless and dangerous pursuit. We lay no claims to gifts in that direction. At the same time there are a few broad, general propositions on which we would be willing to risk a small bet. For instance, we don't believe that a lame man will ever win the hundred-meter race at the Olympic Games. We think it highly unlikely that a one-armed man will ever become the champion heavyweight boxer of the world. Furthermore, we are just as well convinced that no adult of American education who can't write a decently spelled and tolerably grammatical letter will ever develop into one of the masters of fiction.



THE lame and halt who have athletic ambitions are so few as to be negligible, but the ungrammatical and almost illiterate who have literary aspirations are legion. They write to us every day. We have heard it said that every man has at least one good story to tell, and that it is our business to get the story. We don't dispute either of these opinions. Far be it from us to smother kindling genius. But to most of the letters we receive from those ambitious to write stories we can send no encouragement. We answer all the letters frankly and earnestly, and we can't honestly offer encouragement to a man who has no chance. Every one has some special bent, and for every one there is some thing which he can do a little better than anything else. He's wasting his time when he's trying anything else.

and the great majority of those who ask us for advice or encouragement about stories they want to write can surely put their time to better use. We've talked now and then in these pages about the art of story writing, and what makes a good story and a bad. Just now we have a few more words to add.



IF you pick up any handbook on rhetoric you will be told that there are three things necessary to a good style of writing—first, clearness; second, strength; third, grace. We think it best to devote most attention to the first of the three. To tell a man to be forcible or graceful is a little too much like telling him to be tall and strong. These are to a great extent natural gifts and can seldom be acquired. After all, in story writing, once having discovered that you have a story to tell, the most important thing is to convey it to the reader so that he cannot fail to understand it. Make your meaning clear and definite. If you have to spend an hour over a single phrase, say exactly what you mean and say it so that the reader understands with the minimum of mental effort on his part. Have you ever seen a midnight landscape illuminated by a lightning flash so that every detail of tree and foliage is stamped vividly on the retina? If you can make your scenes, your actions, your thoughts burst on the reader with such instantaneous clarity you will have accomplished something worth while.

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

A NYTHING that hinders the transmission of your story to the reader is so much handicap, so much dead weight. Dialect, for instance, can become a wearisome and deadly thing. At its best it is indicated rather than reproduced, and in the hands of a real artist is seldom a matter of peculiar spelling, but a racy and distinctive sort of diction and idiom. If it is funny, if it is really picturesque and interesting, it has its place, but three-fourths of the stories in which dialect predominates would be better told in plain English, and half of them would be better not told at all.



THREE'S another form of story which sometimes becomes trying to the readers' patience. It's what one might call a retold story. A, we will say, tells the reader that he meets B, and after some preliminaries B tells the story. The story may run for a hundred thousand words, but we still see him sitting there like Scheherazade rambling on with a narrative that takes some five hours to read, and which would take about a week to relate by word of mouth. If the writer has the mercy to interrupt this narrator of his for food and refreshment, it only breaks the current of the tale and destroys whatever illusion of reality may inhere in it. A real craftsman may succeed in a "retold" story, or in a story told by several different people as Richard Washburn Child did in "The Blue Wall," which appeared recently in this magazine, but it's a risky business at the best. That particular road to success is strewn with the bones of a great many failures.



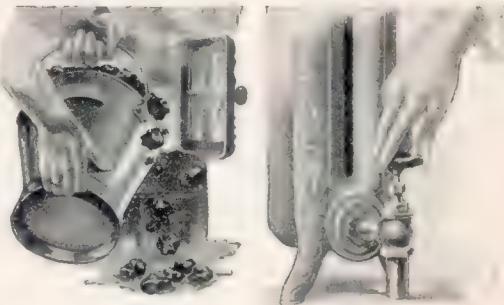
A GREAT many people have been writing stories for a great many years, all using the same currency of speech for the transmission of their thought values. Like old and defaced and mutilated coins there are some words and phrases that are trite and worn out, that have been used too often and passed through too many hands. Slang and vulgar colloquialisms are counterfeit coin. They are debased and do not ring true, empty of real thought and poetry. Don't try to pass them off, either, for genuine English speech. Speak your own thoughts in your own words. There's plenty of good, unspoiled English still for all of us, and new idioms and metaphors and phrases waiting to be coined every day. Of course all this is of no value to you unless you have a story to tell. There are college professors who know everything that Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater ever wrote who can't write an interesting story, and there are men more or less self-educated who find it difficult to be uninteresting at any time.



WE have not left ourselves much room in which to speak of the next issue of the magazine, but we think that it can speak well enough for itself. The complete novel is "The Fugitive," the tale of an American engineer in Cuba, by Roy Norton, author of the "Willow Creek" stories. The rest of the magazine is made up of the work of such writers as George Randolph Chester, Jacques Futrelle, George Pattullo, C. E. Van Loan, E. Phillips Oppenheim, William Hamilton Osborne, Francis Lynde, and Robert V. Carr.

Heating or heaving---which?

Are you going through another winter of laboriously heaving coal and ashes up and down stairs and through the living rooms, spreading a path of destruction, and straining your back, patience and purse? Or, will you be ready at the turn of a valve to flood your house this Fall with the soft, genial, cleanly warmth so silently and surely distributed by



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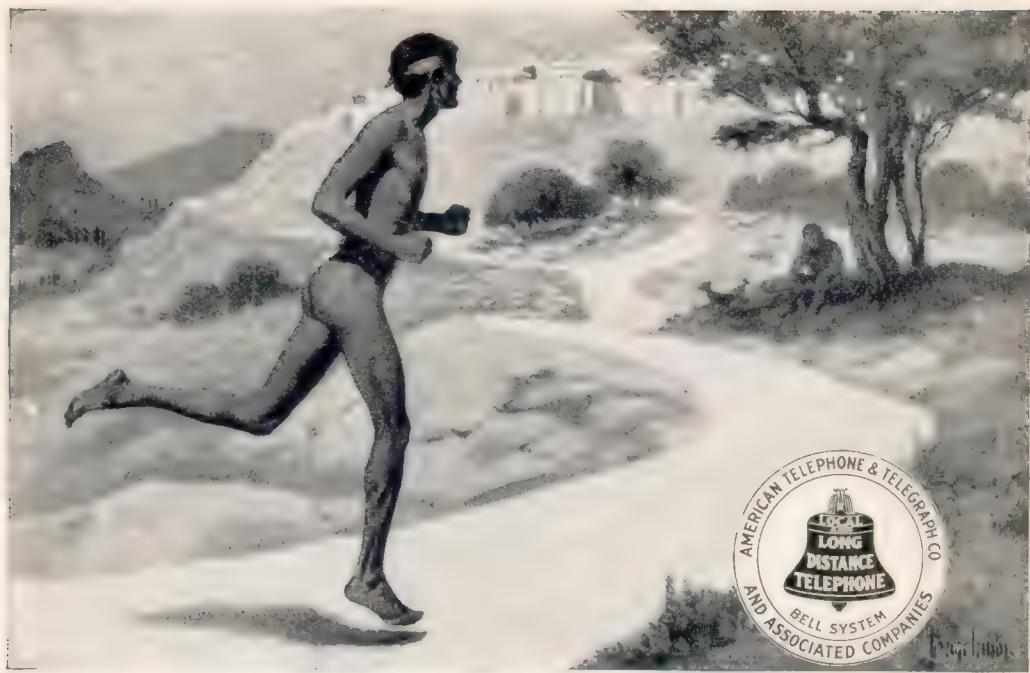


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Right at the grocer's hand is a package of Uneeda Biscuit. He hands you the package—you hand him the coin. A trifling transaction?

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The Royal messenger of ancient times has given way to the democratic telephone of to-day. Cities, one hundred or even two thousand miles apart, are connected in a few seconds, so that message and answer follow one another as if two persons were talking in the same room.

This instantaneous telephone service not only meets the needs of the State in great emergencies, but it meets the daily needs of millions of the plain people. There can be no quicker service than that which is everywhere at the command of the humblest day laborer.

Inventors have made possible communication by telephone service. The Bell System, by connecting seven million people together, has made telephone service so inexpensive that it is used twenty-five million times a day.

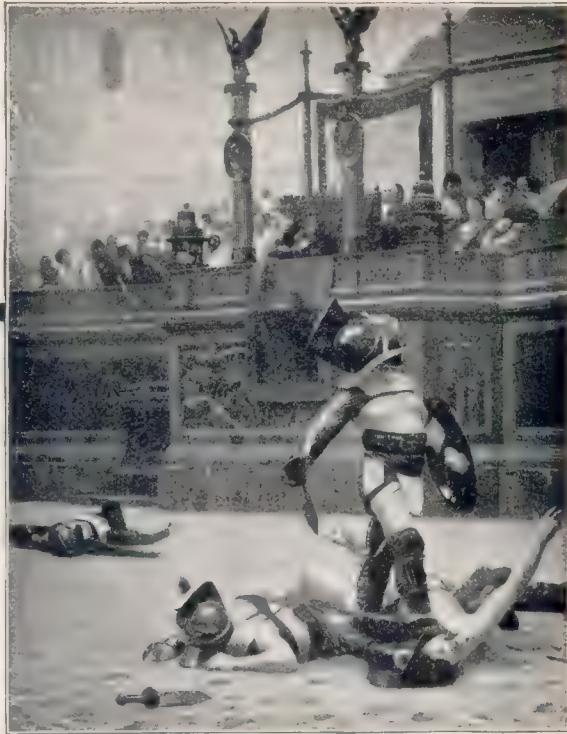
Captains of war and industry might, at great expense, establish their own exclusive telephone lines, but in order that any person having a telephone may talk with any other person having a telephone, there must be One System, One Policy and Universal Service.

AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

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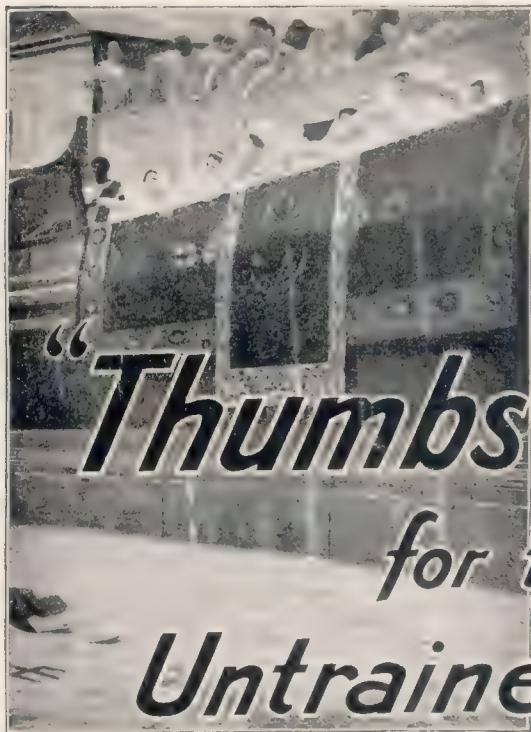
In Ancient Rome the fate of the defeated gladiator was decided by the spectators. "Thumbs Up" meant another chance—"Thumbs Down" meant failure.

Today the verdict in the business world is always "Thumbs Down" for the Untrained Man.



You need not be the under man. If you have a spark of ambition, and can read and write, you *can* rise to better things, and win success *in your chosen line of work.*

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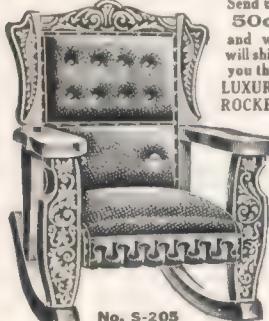
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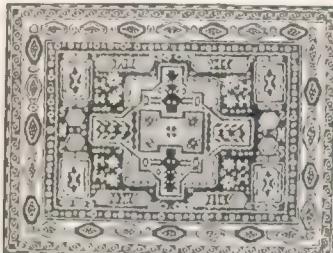
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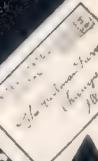
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Somebody's Hurt!

IT'S the old story of the streets of cities where day by day many people are more or less seriously injured. Many drivers and motormen are reckless or careless, but with every precaution by motormen, drivers of trucks, and the police, the danger is so great that no man ought to be without accident insurance.

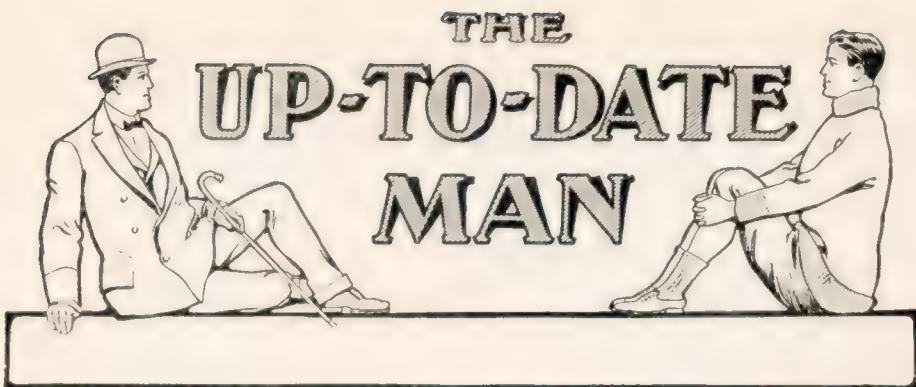
In the hurry of city life the time may come when about *you* the crowd will gather and *you* will need help—and most of all, the help from a policy of insurance in **The Travelers of Hartford** covering all kinds and manners of accidents. It will pay the doctor's bill—keep the family while you are recovering from your injury, or, in case of death provide a means by which your family can face the future.

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TEAR OFF

Send particulars. My name, address and date of birth are written below.



The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

HOW to carry one's watch handily with evening dress has always been a bit of a problem. Some men stow it, chainless, into the left waistcoat pocket. Others tuck it into the watch pocket of the trousers, fastening it for security's sake to a thin gold chain, which is slipped in and out the suspender ends.

Since waistcoat watch chains of gold are not worn with evening dress, a narrow ribbon of silk or moiré is sometimes used, and this does not look at all bad.

The newest and "smartest" evening watch chain is formed of small white pearls linked together with platinum, and stretches straight across from lower pocket to lower pocket.

The buttons of the waistcoat are pearl set in platinum to match the watch chain, and the whole effect is both befitting and becoming.

White evening waistcoats are now more "U"-shaped in front, with broad edges and sharply accentuated cotton corners. These should protrude slightly below the coat, but not so far as to suggest that the waistcoat is cut too long.

However pleasing a woman may look in a bathing suit, the everyday man is seldom an engaging figure. Un-

less a professional swimmer, he is ungainly and angular, and seems to be "all hands and feet." For this reason, well-bred men do not attempt to "dress up" for the dip, preferring to be as inconspicuous as dark colors can make them.

Black, navy, and Oxford gray are about the only colors that good form sanctions for the surf. Gaudily striped suits are worn by the "don't-know-hows," who fancy themselves "beach Apollos," but who shamble along and "toe in."

Since one cannot give free rein to personal whim in the essentials of evening dress, which must comport with the established code, the faddist turns perforce to the incidentals.

White silk hose with black side clocks betray that craving for "differentness" which is supposed to constitute distinction, but seldom does.

Such hose are conspicuous, and the conspicuous usually skates on thin ice under which lies vulgarity. White hose might fitly accompany white serge Tuxedo suits of the type worn at Newport a year ago, but they look "off" with black suits and black pumps.

Another crotchet of the fad-mad is to wear black silk hose em-



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Morning Dress for Early Fall.

broidered on the ankle with a white monogram, or white silk hose embroidered with a black monogram. The one is just as silly as the other.

Monograms should not be flaunted in the observer's face. Their primary purpose is to identify, not to bedazzle. They are affixed to belongings of dress for the wearer's inward satisfaction, not for outward show.

While the formality of afternoon dress unbends with grilling weather, the laws of convention cannot be subordinated to personal convenience as concerns wedding dress.

True, some men have been married during midsummer in serge or flannel lounge suits, and one social eccentric kicked over the traces by going to the altar in tennis clothes. Faugh!

These, however, are cases apart, in which the accepted standards were deliberately flouted by individuals, or by the consent of all the participants in the ceremony.

Those who aim to follow the prescribed custom wear the braid-bound cutaway, gray striped trousers, a "self" waistcoat with white edging, a white

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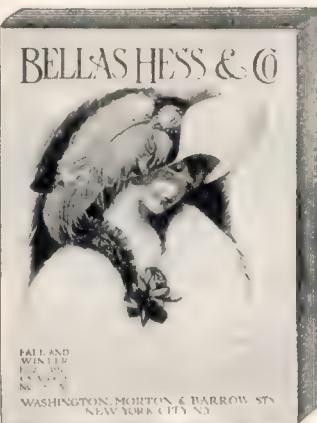
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The frock coat is undoubtedly coming into its own again, but this autumn will not see it in the full flower of its vogue. The braided cutaway has proved itself so handy a coat that it can't be dislodged from favor overnight.

Therefore the cutaway will continue to be the coat most worn this season, as last, by the younger set. The approved fabrics are still black and gray in both plain and ribbed effects.

As in all the new coats, alike for evening, afternoon, and morning, the lapels of the cutaway are to be shorter than hitherto, and the waistline is higher and hip-hugging. The skirts swerve sharply back. Coat fronts are soft and supple and devoid of stiffening.

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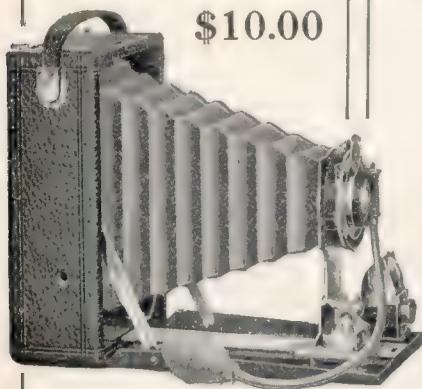
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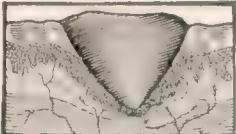
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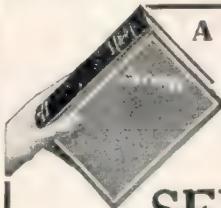
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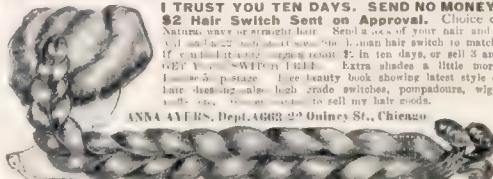
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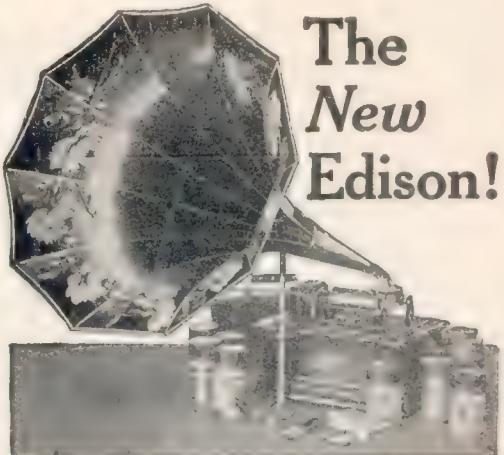
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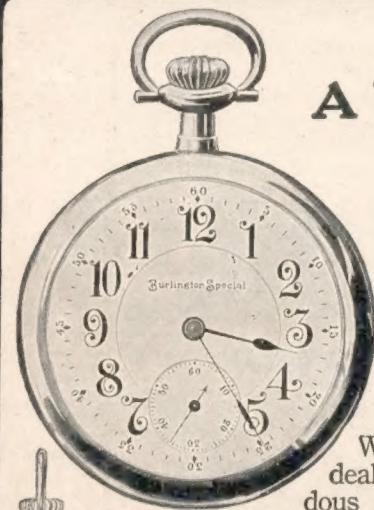
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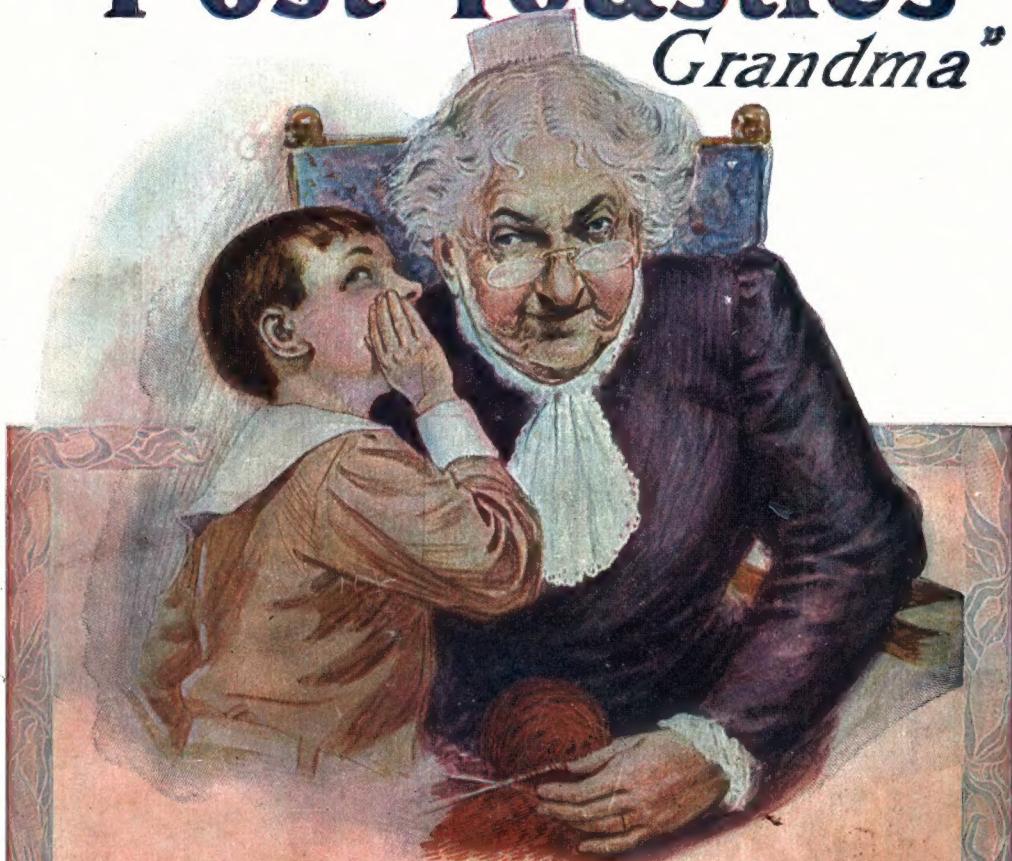
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